

LIFE IN ANCIENT BENGAL BEFORE THE RISE OF THE PĀLAS

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Dedicated to

My beloved mother Smt. Santimoyee Chakroborty

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PREFACE

Bengal, a province in British India, which is now divided into two parts, viz. Bangladesh and West Bengal (Bangladesh is now an independent State, while West Bengal is one of the States of the Indian Union) had a glorious past.

Bengal had built up a civilisation of its own even before the penetration of the Aryans in Northern India. Though Bengal had maintained a Socio-Cultural link with the rest of India, it had developed a separate entity for a long time and it was probably during the time of the Nandas and Mouryas that parts of Bengal came under the way of the rulers of Northern India.

Greater Bengal in ancient times, comprised not only the present Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh (now an Independent state), but also the Bengali speaking tracts in Bihar, Assam and Tripura.

The Main principalities (*Janapadas*) of ancient Bengal were Gauḍa, Vanga, Dāvaka, Hārikela, Puṇḍravardhana etc. After the fall of the Guptas, Gauḍa and Vanga were actually the two main parts of the land. Though the attempts of Śaśāṅka, the king of Gauḍa to establish supremacy over the soils of Northern India failed, it sowed the seeds of aspiration in the minds of the people of Gauḍa (as well as of Vanga) to establish their supremacy over the political affairs of Northern India. The cherished dream of the people of Gauḍa had been fulfilled by Dharmapāla, one of the mightiest rulers of the Pāla dynasty.

The Socio-cultural institutions of Bengal were to a great extent different from those of the other parts of Northern India. The mixture of different races and tribes (like the Austro-loids, the Dravadians, Tibeto - Burman and Aryans) gave the people a definite stature and character. The Bengalees being of mixed origin became industrious, tolerant and enterprising. It was for

their racial characteristics that they were able to make adjustment with the new situations and to bring about a synthesis between the cultures of different races.

The people of Bengal had built up their social, religious and cultural institutions according to their ideas and needs. These institutions had deep roots in the soils of Bengal (like other parts of India). Bengal had not offered submission easily to the Aryan people. Even after aryanisation, the people of Bengal continued to follow the habits and customs of their own. The Aryan society could not uproot the non-Aryan institutions from the soils of Bengal. Neglecting the bitter attitude of the Smṛitikāras of the Brāhmanical society, the general people followed the rites, habits and customs of their own. The Aryan society in course of time adopted many of the Non-Aryan institutions of the Bengali society into their culture.

The gradual progress of the country in different matters from the earliest times and the efforts of the ruler of Gauḍa to bring about a political unification of the land made the people of Bengal conscious of their separate identity. They tried to develop their culture and showed much interest in education and literature since the time of the Guptas. They also showed much proficiency in trade and commerce. The gradual progress of the people in the Post-Gupta period made the period distinct and significant.

In my humble endeavour I shall try to depict the significant aspects of the Bengali society and the gradual development of the Bengali culture during the post-Gupta (Pre-Pala) period.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to my respected guide Dr. Bela Lahiri M.A. D. Lit, Ex Prof. of the Jadavpur University without whose guidance and help it was not possible for me to complete the works. I am also grateful to my wife Smt. Dipa Chakroborty and the then teaching and non-teaching staff of Thanamakhua Model High School, Howrah who encouraged me much to submit my Thesis Paper. I have to express my gratitude to Dr. Sisir Kumar Maiti who has taken the initiative to publish my works.

Foreword

I have read the works entitled, 'Life in Ancient Bengal before the Rise of the Palas' written by Dr. Ashim Kumar Chakroborty thoroughly. This Thesis paper had been submitted by him to Jadavpur University for Ph.D. degree. It has been accepted by the experts for which the Ph.D. degree has been conferred on him in 1998.

Dr. Chakroborty has been established in his thesis that the People of Bengal had maintained a separate existence for a long time. The custom and practices are to a great extent different from that of the Northern India even to-day. The relation between the people of ancient period and the gradual infiltration of the Aryan culture in Bengal have been discussed elaborately by Dr. Asim Kumar Chakroborty in his works. It will certainly make the readers interested.

Beside political history, his works have discussed the socio religious development and the gradual changes of the economic life of ancient Bengal in details.

The analytical account of the works will help the advanced students to have a clear idea about the gradual development and the drawbacks of the people of ancient Bengal. The author is impartial

His Thesis is unbiased and a major contribution to the socio-religious and economic life in ancient Bengal.

INTRODUCTION

(A) *Historical Background : (Before the rise of the pālas)*

The sources of information for the political history of ancient Bengal before the Gupta period are very meagre. The Scholars are not yet able to throw much light on the political history of Bengal before the penetration of the Aryans to North-eastern India. For the early history of Bengal the students are to depend on the *Aitrāreya Brāhmaṇa*, the two great epics, viz. the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Manusamhitā*, *Āchārāṅgasutra*, *Bhagavati Sutra*, the works of the foreign travellers, and the inscriptions of different kings like *Samudragupta*, *Kumāragupta*, *Vainya Gupta*, *Chandravarman*, *Budha-Gupta*, *Gopa Chandra*, *Dharmāditya*, *Samāchāradeva*, *Śaśāṅka*, *Bhāskara Varmana*, *Jayanāga* and others. But most of these sources have no connection with each other. They do not help us to understand the continuation of events or progress of time. Some of the literary sources have very little historical information, while some others bear contradictory statements. Moreover, their date is difficult to determine.

Bengal is not mentioned either in the *Rigveda* or in the other three Vedas. The name of the land is first mentioned in the *Aitrāreya Brāhmaṇa* which refers to the native tribes of Bengal but it gives a bad impression about them. It says that the *Puṇḍras* (of Bengal), *Andhras* and *Śabaras* lived on the borders of the Aryan country and they were bandits.

From different sources it appears that for a long time even in the later Vedic Age, Bengal was divided into a number of *Janapadas* and these *Janapadas* were ruled by non-Aryan tribes; and for this reason the *Smṛitikāras* like *Manu* assumed a disdainful attitude towards the native tribes of Bengal and

described them as degraded Kshatriya, who were not better than Śūdras. They also imposed restrictions to visit the land.

From the Digvijaya Chapter of the *Mahābhārata*, we come to learn that the rulers of some *Janapadas* of Bengal, had accepted defeat at the hands of Bhīma, the second Pāṇḍava, during the time of his expeditions. These rulers were Vāsudeva of Paundra, Samudrasena of Vanga and an unnamed King of Suhma. At that time the sea-coast and the island were inhabited by the Kirātas and other non-Aryan tribes.

From the Śāntiparva Chapter of the *Mahābhārata* we come to know that the people of Bengal had a close political alliance with Jarāsandha of Magadha who had formed a political confederacy of eastern and central Indian states. Under him Karṇa of Anga, Śiśupāla of Chedi, Vakra of Karusūā, the king of Vanga, Puṇḍra and Prāgyotisha (Assam) had formed an alliance against the Pāṇḍavas. This confederacy led by Jarāsandha supported the cause of the Kauravas against the Pāṇḍavas in the great *Mahābhārata* war.

The Purāṇas and other traditions, also refer to the close relation among the five kingdoms of eastern India, viz. Anga, Vaṅga, Puṇḍra, Suhma and Kalinga.

In the Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa Chapter of the Rāmāyaṇa (canto 36-37) we find that Daśaratha, king of Ayodhyā intended to send invitation to the rulers of his friendly countries among whom he mentions the king of Vaṅga. From it we may presume that the king of Vanga maintained a friendly relation with Ayodhyā at that time.

The name of Vaṅga and Rāḍha are also found in the early Jain and Budhist texts. Though in the age of the *Mahājnapadas* (6th century B.C.), the principalities of Bengal did not play a prominent part, still they maintained their independence. In the Sanskrit drama 'Pratijñā Jaugandharayana' king Chandra Pradyota Mahāsena of Avanti, in course of his conversation with his wife regarding their daughter's marriage, mentions his friendly relation with the rulers of Vaṅga. King Chandra Pradyota had a keen rivalry with Ajātaśatru of Magadha. Chandra Prodyota

might have set up his friendly relation with ruler of Vanga for crushing the power of Ajātaśatru of Magadha, the common enemy of these two countries.

From the contemporary sources we come to know that inspite of their military strength, Ajatasatru and his successors could not invade Bengal which maintained its independence in the Pre-Maurya period.

The Greek writers who came to India along with Alexander during the time of his invasion mention the names of two kingdoms in the Gangetic region viz. Prasaioi and Gaṅgaridai¹. If Prasaioi is identified with Magadha with (Palibothra) Pāṭaliputra as its capital, Gaṅgaridai can be identified with Rāḍha². The Greek historians like *Quintus Curtius* and *Plutarch* mention the strength of the kingdoms of Gaṅgāridai and Prasaioi. There are reasons to believe that Alexander dared not to undertake an expedition to these two kingdoms. Their military strength and the use of numerous trained elephants in the battle field might have brought a horror in the minds of the Greek soldiers. From the writings of *Quintus Curtius* and *Diodorus* it appears that these two kingdoms might have formed an alliance during the time of the invasion (or they formed a dual monarchy) to resist the attack of Alexander³.

But the picture had been changed after the fall of the Nandas. The Gaṅgaridai made an alliance with Kaliṅga against Magadha. Dr. B.C. Sen thinks that the growing strength of Magadha had alarmed the Gaṅgaridai and encouraged the rulers to make an alliance with Kalinga⁴. (Pliny uses the term 'Gangaridum-Calingarum' and from this term it can be presumed that at least a part of Bengal (the Gangarides) made an alliance with Kalinga to maintain her separate existence against Magadha). It paid a good dividend and Bengal was not invaded by the Mauryas until Asoka ascended the throne of Magadha.

To check the growing power of Kalinga and her allies, Aśoka, the third ruler of the Maurya dynasty, invaded Kalinga. From the 13th rock-edict inscription of Aśoka we come to know that the huge loss of human lives and havoc of Kalinga war

brought a change in the minds of Aśoka, who took an oath not to declare war against his neighbours in future⁵. However, he seemed to have brought a great part of Bengal under his control⁶.

His authority over Puṇḍravardhana is mentioned in the legend of *Divyāvadāna*. The famous Mahāsthana inscription also confirms his authority over northern Bengal (Puṇḍravardhana)⁷. A large number of monasteries had been established in different parts of Bengal (Samataṭa, Puṇḍravardhana, Tāmralipta etc.) during the time of Aśoka. This is known from Hiuen Tsiang who had seen them when he visited Bengal. If Bengal were outside the pale of the Maurya empire it must have been mentioned as such in the edicts of Aśoka.

In Aśoka's time Tāmralipta was the chief port of the Magadhan empire and the communication between Ceylon and Magadha was maintained through Tāmralipta. Aśoka paid his visit to Bengal and at least once he came to Tāmralipta. From the Ceylonese chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*, we come to know how Aśoka visited Tāmralipta on the occasion of the voyage of Mahendra and Saṅghamitra with the holy branch of the Bodhi tree to Sinhala (modern Srilankā) at the time of the rule of the pious king Devanampriya Tissa of Ceylon^{7A}.

The history of Bengal from the fall of the Mauryas to the rise of the Guptas is still quite dark. The rule of a tribe named Maroundai (or Murundas) over Bengal is mentioned by the Greek writer Ptolemy. Sten Konow thinks that in the Kushana inscriptions the word Murunda has been used to express the term 'over lord'. Scholars like Dr. B. C. Sen think that they (the Murundas) might have originally been the viceroys of the Kushana Suzerains, but seem to have taken the earliest opportunity of carving out an independent state after the fall of the Kushanas⁹.

The period of confusion and uncertainty in eastern India came to an end with the rise of the Guptas. But during the time of Chandragupta I, the first powerful ruler of the dynasty, Bengal had maintained its independence; the efforts to include Bengal

in the Gupta empire had begun from the time of Samudragupta.

We have epigraphical records which narrate the direct rule of the Gupta emperors over Bengal^{9A}. Two copper plate inscriptions of Kumāragupta - I found at Dāmārdpur, the third at Dhanāidāha in Rājshahi district in Bangladesh and the fourth at Baigrām (near Hili in West Dinajpur district of West-Bengal)¹⁰ speak of the Gupta rule in Bengal .

The Baigrām Plate narrates the close relationship between Kumāragupta I and the administrative head of a district of Bengal. From the Dāmārdpur copper Plate inscription¹¹, we come to know that *Puṇḍravardhana Bhukti* (Present North Bengal) was an integral part of the Gupta empire. The Officer-in-Charge of the *Bhukti* had been appointed by the emperor himself. In the Dāmārdpur plates (Nos. I and II) the names of Uparika Chiradatta and Kumārāmatya. Vetravarmana are mentioned as the Governors of Puṇḍravardhana and Koṭivarsha respectively, during the reign of Kumāragupta-I. We have no clear information about the other parts of Bengal which had been conquered and annexed by Samudragupta, the grand father of Kumaragupta-I.

After the death of Kumāragupta-I, the disintegrating forces raised their heads in the Gupta empire. The rulers had to face the Huṇa invasions. The rebellious provincial governors tried to throw off the allegiance towards the Gupta rulers. To make the situation worse a fratricidal struggle seems to have broken out in the royal family. Hence it is difficult to ascertain who was the successor of Kumaragupta-I in Bengal.

No epigraphical records about the immediate successors of Kumāragupta-I (like Skandagupta, Puragupta Narsimhagupta etc.) have been found in Bengal, though the coins of Skandagupta, Nara-simhagupta and Kumāragupta have been found in different districts of Bengal. The Dāmārdpur Plates Nos 3 and 4¹² mention the names of two governors of Puṇḍravardhana, viz. Brahmādatta and Jayadatta who had been serving during the reign of Budhagupta. From the Dāmārdpur copper plate inscription and sārṇath image inscription we come to know that at least Puṇḍravardhana-Bhukti acknowledged the rule of Budhagupta

who tried to restore the rule of the Guptas over eastern India.

After the death of Budhagupta the Gupta rulers probably lost their supremacy over the soils of Bengal, though a portion was still in their possession. The history of Bengal after the death of Budhagupta is obscure. From the Gunāigarh inscription¹³ we come to know that a Gupta prince named Vainyagupta had issued a grant at the request of the dependent 'Mahārāja' Rudradatta. Gunāigarh has been located in the Tippera district of modern Bangladesh. In this grant Vainyagupta had styled himself as 'Mahārājā' and 'Paramaśaiva'. Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that after the death of Kumāragupta, the Gupta princes had set up different independent kingdoms in different parts of the empire and therefore, it was not unlikely that Vainyagupta, taking advantage of the decline of the Imperial Guptas had established an independent kingdom over a part of eastern India¹⁴. D. C. Ganguly¹⁵ finds similarity of the gold coins of Vainyagupta with those of the imperial Guptas. The rule of Vainyagupta gives evidence to the fact that at least a part of Bengal was under the hands of the Guptas in the first decade of the 6th century A.D.

The *Dāmadōrpur Plates* also throw some light on the rule of the Guptas in Bengal. Though the name of the Gupta ruler in the *Dāmadōrpur plate No. 5* has been lost, Dr. R. G. Basak¹⁶ thinks that the name of the Gupta ruler was Bhanugupta, while P.L. Paul¹⁷ identifies him with Vishnugupta. The latter thinks that Vishnugupta was the last known Gupta king of Bengal. From different sources it appears that while the Gupta rulers of Northern and Western India had been facing the Hūṇa invasions and the rising of local leaders like Yaśodharmana of Mālwa, Gauḍa was the last stronghold of the Guptas.

The Later Guptas: After the fall of the Gupta dynasty in Northern India, a dynasty marked as the Later Guptas appeared in the political stage of Bengal. They ruled mainly in Northern Bengal. A portion of West Bengal had been annexed to their kingdom. The *Aphsad Inscription* describes the Later Guptas as the successors of Kṛishnagupta. The fourth ruler of the dynasty was Kumāragupta, who was a contemporary of the Maukhari

king *Isānavarmana*. *Kumāragupta* was succeeded by *Dāmodārgupta* who reigned upto A.D 543-44. His son *Mahasenagupta* was the contemporary of *Susthitavarmana*, father of *Bhāskaravarmana* of *Kāmarūpa*. The next ruler of the dynasty was *Madhāvagupta*, who was a contemporary of *Harshavardhana*. His son *Ādityasena* and his successors are known from six *Vaidyanāth* temple inscriptions of *Deogaṛh* and through these inscriptions we come to know the chronological order of the dynasty. *Ādityasena* and his three successors may be placed approximately between 650 and 725 A.D.^{17A} .

The Later Guptas ruled over only a portion of Bihar in the 7th century A.D. and most of their inscriptions have been found in that region. Only one inscription for the early period has been so far recovered in Bengal.

The relation between the Imperial Guptas and the Later Guptas is not very clear. They might or might not have been connected by blood with the Imperial Guptas, but they were from the very beginning in possession of a substantial portion of the Gupta empire. Their pretension as the successors of the Imperial Guptas was cleverly recognised in later times. They ruled mainly in Northern Bengal upto the 6th century A.D. They were forced to take shelter in Bihār at the end of the 6th century when *Śaśanka* appeared in the political stage with his own strength.

The Later Guptas had to face the invasions of *Yasodharmana* of *Malwa*, *Isānavarmana* of the *Maukhari* dynasty and *Susthita Varmana* of *Kāmarūpa*. *Yaśodharmana* of *Mālwa*'s claim that he had carried victorious march upto the bank of *Brahmaputra* river was probably true; he might have weakened the power and position of the Later Guptas of Bengal^{17B}. The *Haraha Inscription* of *Isānavarmana* (dated 554 A.D.) claims that *Isānavarmana* ravaged *Gauḍa* and compelled the rulers to retreat towards the sea¹⁸. From the *Apshād Inscription*¹⁹ we come to know about a battle which took place on the bank of the *Brahmaputra* between *Mahāsenagupta* and *Susthitavaramana* of *Kāmarūpa* in which *Mahāsenagupta* defeated the latter. It must have restored the prestige of the Later Guptas in the politics of North-Eastern

India. Probably after the death of Mahāsenagupta, the Later Guptas failed to maintain their supremacy in Northern Bengal. The rise of Gauḍa under Śaśānka forced them to leave Northern Bengal.

While the Later Guptas had been exercising their sovereignty in Northern Bengal, a different regime existed in Eastern Bengal. From the five copper plate inscriptions of Faridpur²⁰ and the inscriptions of Mallaśārul²¹ we come to know the names of three rulers of East Bengal, viz Gopa Chandra, Dharmādityā and Samāchāradeva who ruled in Samtata-Vaṅga (the kingdom comprising the southern and eastern Bengal and the southern part of West Bengal) in between 525 A.D. and 575 A.D. Dr. R. C. Majumdar thinks that Samatata-Vaṅga was the first independent kingdom that arose in Bengal on the ruins of the Gupta empire²². These three rulers assumed the title *Mahārājadhirāja* and at least one of them, Samāchāradeva issued gold coins²³, which were very similar to those of the later Gupta Emperors. Considering the purity of the gold coins and their fine workmanship, Dr. B. Lahiri thinks that Samāchāradeva ascended the throne of Samatata-Vaṅga just after the end of the Gupta rule in Bengal²⁴. Dr. Lahiri in this connection refers to the 'Seated Lakshmī' and the 'Rājālīlā' devices' of Samāchāradeva's coins. The Seated Lakshmī device reminds us of the similar issues of the Gupta king Narsimhagupta Bālāditya, while the 'Rājālīlā device' of Samāchāradeva's second type of coins reminds us of the Apratighat type of Kumāragupta-I. Samāchāradeva is said to have assumed the title 'Narendrāditya', following the traditions of the Gupta rulers.

Another ruler of Vanga was Gopa Chandra who is said to have ruled in Vanga at least for 18 years. The relationship between these three rulers, viz. Samachāradeva, Gopa Chandra and Dharmādityā; their dates and order of succession are not free from confusions, so it is difficult for the scholars to reach to a definite conclusion.

From the gold coins found in Eastern Bengal, the existence of a few kings of this area can be guessed. These gold coins are

rude debased imitations of the Gupta coins and they are found at Kotālipāḍa and Sābhar (in the Faridpur district and Dacca district of Bangladesh)²⁵. Only two of the names of the issues can somehow be read; one as Śrī Sudhanyāditya and other as Pṛithuvira or Pṛithuvala. But for the lack of other informations we can not say anything about the rule of Śrī Sudhanyāditya and Pṛithuvīra.

From different land grants it appears that the three rulers of Vaṅga viz. Samāchāradeva, Gopa Chandra and Dhārmāditya were strong enough and they brought peace and prosperity to the people and made them conscious of their power and potentialities²⁶. Their reign may be placed between 525 and 575 A.D. with the margin of a few years both at the beginning and at the end²⁷.

We have no definite information as to how and when this independent kingdom came to an end. From the Māhakūta Inscription²⁸ we come to know about the conquest of Bengal by the Chālukya Kīrtivarman. His conquest might have taken place in the last quarter of the 6th century A.D. It can be guessed that the invasion of Kīrtivarman might have had some adverse effects and brought the ruin of Vaṅga.

The rise of Gauḍa under Śaśāṅka might have also given the death-blow to the independent kingdom of Vaṅga.

Śaśāṅka - The rise of Gauḍa after the fall of the Guptas had made the history of Bengal remarkable and significant. Probably by the end of the 6th century A.D. Gauḍa had formed an independent kingdom. It was during the rule of Śaśāṅka that Gauḍa reached its political zenith and a vast portion of Bihar had been annexed to Gauḍa. It is presumed by scholars like Dr. R.C. Majumder²⁹ that the defeat of Mahāseṇagupta (of the Later Gupta family) at the hands of the Kālachuris paved the way for the rise of Gauḍa under Śaśāṅka.

Śaśāṅka was the first powerful ruler of Gauḍa. We have no clear information about the predecessors of Śaśāṅka. Scholars like N. K. Bhattasālī and Alterkar think that his predecessors ruled in Eastern Bengal. But Śaśāṅka was the ruler of Gauḍa which

was far away from Eastern Bengal and there is no similarity between the coin-types of Śaśānka and Samāchārdeva and his successors³⁰.

Dr. B. Lahiri³¹, considering the common reverse device of coins of Jayanāga and Śaśānka, has put emphasis on the close relation between these two rulers. Dr. B. Lahiri points out that the coins of Jayanāga are more connected with the Gupta prototypes and are finer in execution in comparison with those of Śaśānka. She also points out that the Chakra standard as well as the epithet '*Paramabhāgavata*' applied to Jayanāga in his *Vappāghoshavāta Inscription* makes it clear that he was an ardent follower of Vaishnavism. But Śaśānka was a follower of the Śaiva sect. It is not unlikely that Jayanāga had established an independent dynasty in Gauḍa about the middle of the 6th century A.D. Śaśānka might have started his career as a feudatory of Jayanāga and later on he established his supremacy over Gauḍa³².

There is also a belief that Śaśānka had started his career as a Mahāsāmanta of Mahāsenagupta. Taking advantage of the weakness of the Later Guptas he had thrown off his allegiance to the Later Guptas and established his supremacy over Gauḍa.

From the *Vappāghoshavāta Inscription* we come to know that the capital of Jaynāga was situated at Karnasuvarna and the western districts of Bengal were under his control; the inscription is silent about the origin and end of the dynasty. Probably the rise of Śaśānka gave the death blow to the line of Jayanāga. Śaśānka probably replaced Jayanāga in Gauda.

Śaśānka appeared in the political arena of Bengal sometime before 606 A.D. and extended his suzerainty over lands far beyond the geographical boundary of ancient Bengal³³. His capital was also Karnasuvarna (modern Rājbaridanga, near the modern Railway station of Chiruti, six miles away from Berhampur of the Murshidabad district)³⁴.

We have little knowledge about the early life of Śaśānka. Scholars like R. D. Banerjee try to prove his relation with the Later Guptas while scholars like D. C. Ganguly³⁵ think that Śaśānka

was originally a sub-ordinate vassal of the Maukhāri Kings. Since none of these scholars have any positive evidence to prove their theory, it is difficult to ascertain his relation with Later Guptas (or with the Imperial Guptas) or with the Jayanāga dynasty.

It is believed that the actual name of Śaśānka was Narendra Gupta. R. G. Basak thinks that Narendra has been used by Bāna under the Garb of a pun to refer to Śaśānka. But Dr. R. C. Majumder³⁶ points out that the identification of Narendra with Śaśānka is of extremely doubtful character.

It is already noted that Śaśānka became the supreme of Gauḍa probably by ousting Jayanāga or his descendants from the throne of Kāṃasuvarṇa. He might have belonged to the same type of military adventures as Yaśodharmaṇa of Mālwa of whom we know equally little about his predecessors and successors. Like Yaśodharmaṇa, Śaśānka rose and vanished in the political stage for a certain period, leaving behind only the record of splendid military achievements. Under him the power and prestige of Bengal was raised and for the first time Bengal tried to establish her supremacy in the politics of Northern India.

There is no doubt that Śaśānka established his supremacy over Northern and Western Bengal; otherwise he could not have proceeded towards Kāmarūpa. From the contemporary sources it is also obvious that he had set up his authority over Gauḍa before the accession of Harshavardhana to the throne of Thaneshwar. The Ganjām plates of Mādhavarāja dated 619 A.D.³⁷ indicates his authority over Orissa. By making a prophetic statement the Ārya *Mañjusree Mūlakalpa*, the Buddhist text, recognises the rule of Śaśānka over the Gangetic valley upto Vārānasi. Hiuen Tsang admits his political influence upto Kushīnagara (in U.P.)³⁸. His supremacy over the kingdom of Kangoda has been recognised by the modern historians. Thus it appears that excepting Kāmarūpa and some inaccessible portions of Bengal, Śaśānka brought the whole of Eastern India under his control. Admitting the growing influence of Sasanka over eastern India, Bāna uses the term, 'Śaśānka-Maṇḍala'³⁹. As the term is

interpreted in the light of the *Arthaśāstra*, it indicates a circle of states controlled by Śaśānka.

In the beginning of the 7th century A.D. the four powerful states, viz. Thāneswar, Kanauj, Mālwa and Gauḍa had appeared in the political stage of Northern India on the ruins of the Gupta empire. They were engaged in a struggle for supremacy. The relation between the Later Guptas of Mālwa and Maukhāris of Kanauj was far from cordial and the matrimonial alliance between the Pushyabhūts of Thāneswar and the Maukhāris of Kanauj alarmed Devagupta, the ruler of Mālwa. To check the growing political power of Kanauj and Thāneswar he sought the help of Śaśānka, the ambitious ruler of Gauḍa, who had a dream of conquest of Northern India. Śaśānka gave a sound response to the call of Devagupta. They had formed a dual alliance to destroy the power of Kanauj and Thāneswar.

When Prabhākaravardhana was in his death-bed, Devagupta and Śaśānka decided to take the opportunity of the situation to invade Kanauj. The simultaneous marches of these two allies, had been pre-planned. Devagupta attacked and killed Grahavarmana, the ruler of Kanauj, and made his queen Rājyaśrī (daughter of Prabhākaravardhana) captive at Kanauj. His next move was to attack and defeat the king of Thāneswar.

After the death of Prabhākaravardhana, his eldest son Rājyavardhana, ascended the throne of Thaneswar. On hearing the death news of his brother-in-law and the march of Devagupta towards Thāneswar, he collected his army and cavalry and set out against Devagupta. From different sources we come to know that the course of events followed rapidly. Rājyavardhana defeated Devagupta and captured a large part of his army, but before he could take any attempt to make his sister free, he himself was killed by Śaśānka⁴⁰

There is a controversy about the death of Rājyavardhana. Although it has been stated that Rājyavardhana was murdered treacherously by Śaśānka, Harshavardhana's own records assert that Rājyavardhana died because of his keeping a promise (satyānuradhana)

After the death of Rājyavardhana, his younger brother Harshavardhana ascended the throne of Thāneswar. The growing power of Śaśāṅka must have made him anxious. To assure his subjects he took an oath that he would clear this earth of the Gauḍas within a short time. He, however, as a practical politician, did not proceed hastily like his brother against Śaśāṅka. He first proceeded to rescue his sister Rājyaśrī. When Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa, being alarmed by the rise of Gauda, sent an envoy to Harsha and proposed an entente against Śaśāṅka, Harsha at once accepted the proposal⁴². The Dual entente between Harsha and Bhāskaravarman compelled Śaśāṅka to leave Kanauj and give up the hope of establishing the supremacy of Gauḍa over Northern India. Having consolidated his authority over a portion of Northern India, Harsha shifted his capital to Kanauj and started his march against Gauḍa, Bāṇa, the court poet of Harsha and Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese Śramaṇa and a friend of Harsha are silent about the results of the campaigns. *The Ārya Mañjusrī Mūlkalpa* the Buddhist text, which was written much later, only describes the successful march of Harsha upto Puṇḍra^{42A}. The

Ganjam plates (dated 619 A.D.) describe the imperial power of Śaśāṅka upto his life time. It can be presumed that during the life time of Śaśāṅka, Harsha and his ally Bhāskaravarman could not secure any decisive victory against Śaśāṅka.

The Dual entente against Śaśāṅka on the other hand, must have forced Śaśāṅka to give up his scheme of expansion towards the West. He had to find out a fresh outlet in the south east. He conquered Kalinga. From the *Ganjām Plates* we come to know that the region of Koṅgodamaṇḍala, extending from the Southern Bank of the Mahanadi to the Northern portions of Ganjam, acknowledged the suzerainty of Śaśāṅka⁴³. Hiuen Tsang, in spite of his friendship with Harsha admits that Śaśāṅka was an independent king upto his last days and died a natural death⁴⁴.

Coins of Śaśāṅka have been found in different places of Bengal⁴⁵. These coins follow the weight standard adopted by the Gupta rulers. Some of his coins show that the deterioration in the purity of the metal. It was due to the financial troubles that Śaśāṅka

faced in later times. It can be presumed that though he enjoyed full sovereignty upto the last days of his reign, occasional outbreak of hostilities with Harsha and his ally gave him much trouble and brought a financial crisis in his kingdom.

The bull symbol of his coins shows that he was a Śaiva. It is alleged by Bānabhatta and the author of the *Ārya Mañjuśrī-Mūlakalpa* that Śaśāṅka assumed a revengeful attitude towards Buddhism. It is also said that he had cut the Bodhi tree, destroyed its roots down to the water and burnt what remained. Hiuen Tsang says that he had to face a miserable death for his anti-Buddhist activity and was taken to hell after his death⁴⁶. His comments only point out his bitter attitude against Śaśāṅka. When Hiuen Tsang visited the important cities and places of Bengal and Magadha like Karnaśuvārṇa, Tāmralipta, Puṇḍravardhana, Magadha etc, he saw a large number of Buddhist monasteries in these places and found Buddhism in a flourishing condition in this region. If Śaśāṅka was anti-Buddhist in nature, he must have persecuted the Buddhists thoroughly in his kingdom. He would not allow them to build the Buddhist monasteries in different places of Gauda and Magadha. R.D. Banerjee⁴⁷ and R.P. Chanda⁴⁸ think that a section of the Buddhists of Bengal and Magadha might have been engaged in a plot against Śaśāṅka and they were loyal to Harsha, the Pro-Buddhist ruler of Kaṇauj, which might have made Śaśāṅka furious and prompted him to take stern action against them. The prosecution was rather political necessity than religious conviction. Our knowledge about the religious ideas of Śaśāṅka is very limited and until we get some further informations we can't say anything about the religious intolerance of Śaśāṅka.

Śaśāṅka, inspite of the adverse comments of the contemporary Buddhist writers, deserves some praise. He was the first powerful ruler of Bengal who saved the country from the possible invasions of the Maukharis and Kāmarupa and made it a powerful state of Eastern India. His empire comprising Gauda-Magadha extended in the south-east upto Ganjām. Though his attempts to set up the supremacy of Bengal in the politics of

Northern India failed, Bengal for the first time drew the admiration of the other parts of Northern India. Śaśāṅka had made a bold bid to build Gauḍa (Bengal) a strong power and laid the foundation on which the Pālas in later times built up their vast empire. Dr. R. C. Majumdar rightly remarks "if he (Śaśāṅka) had a friendly biographer like Bāṇa and Hiuen Tsang, he would probably have appeared to posterity almost as brilliant as Harshavardhana"⁴⁹.

The Period of Anarchy (Mātsyanyāya)

We know very little about the successors of Śaśāṅka from the contemporary literatures and inscriptions. The weakness of the successors of Śaśāṅka gave a unique opportunity to the life long enemies of Śaśāṅka, viz. Harshavardhana and Bhāskaravarman to invade Gauḍa. The *Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscriptions*^{49A} describe the conquest of Gauḍa by Bhāskaravarman and Harsha.

Hiuen Tsang who travelled in Bengal about 638 A.D., found five independent kingdoms in Bengal proper, viz. Puṇḍravardhana, Samatāṭa, Kārṇasuvarṇa, Tāmralipta and Kajāṅgala⁵⁰. He also refers to the capital of each of the kingdoms, though he is silent about the rulers of these kingdoms and their political status.

Though there is a general belief that after the invasion of Harsha and Bhāskaravarman, Bengal had become a part of Harsha's empire, the *Nidhanpur Plates* of Bhāskaravarman give evidence to the establishment of the authority of the king of Kāmrūpa over Gauḍa. Bhāskaravarman described himself as the king of eastern India in these plates; he also promised to look to the safety of the pilgrims upto Tāmralipta. From these plates we can presume that the death of Śaśāṅka gave a unique opportunity to Bhāskaravarman to establish his authority over eastern India. But we cannot rule out the possibility that his powerful ally Harsha might have exercised some control over him since that time.

The weak successors of Bhāskaravarman could not maintain their authority over Bengal for a long time. Bengal

restored her independence once again. But for the lack of strong political leaders she could not restore her former position. She was divided into a number of small principalities. The political history is obscure in the extreme and is marked by chaos and confusion for the period which extends roughly from 650 to 750 A.D.

We have some copper plate inscriptions and grants which describe the rule of some dynasties over different parts of Bengal.

The *Tippera grants of Lokenāth* (about 663-64 A.D.)⁵¹ describe the rule of Nāth Families over Tippera, who before Lokenāth ruled there as feudatories. The grant describes the repeated defeat of Parameśvara (the suzerain of Lokenāth) at the hands of Lokenāth.

The Āsrafpur Plates of the Khāḍgas⁵² and the Deul-Bāḍi Sarvānī image inscription of queen Prabhāvatī throw some light on the Khāḍga dynasty which ruled over Dacca and Tippera districts of modern Bangladesh. They ruled for four generations and may be assigned to a period between 625 and 725 A.D.

Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks, "It is not improbable that the Khāḍga Kings, who ruled over parts of Bengal in the 7th century A.D., came in the train of Tibetan invasions⁵³. The four rulers of the dynasty were Khāḍgodyāma, Jātakhaḍga, Deva Khāḍga and Rājarājabhaṭa. The third ruler Devakhaḍga donated lands for a Buddhist monastery at Sahghamitra in expectation of a long life for his son Rājarājabhaṭa. The last king Rājarājabhaṭa was highly praised by a Chinese traveller Seng Chi who visited his country towards the end of the 7th century A.D. The history of the Khāḍga dynasty after Rājarājabhaṭa is not known to us. Dr. Majumdar thinks that the Khāḍgas might have been overthrown by Govinda Chandra of the Chandra dynasty who re-established his supremacy over Vaṅga⁵⁴.

We have the name of one Rāta dynasty which ruled over a part of Samataṭa in the second half of the 7th century A.D.⁵⁵ Śrijivadharaṇa was the founder of this dynasty. His son Śrīdharāṇa was a pious Vaishnava. It is said that Śrīdharāṇa was a poet and scholar. His son Baladharana was an expert in military science.

The Chandra dynasty had been ruling in Vanga (and occa-

sionally also over Gauḍa) as early as the middle of the 7th century A.D. The last two rulers of the dynasty were Govinda Chandra and Lalita Chandra who are said to have reigned during the last part of the 7th century A.D. and first part of the 8th century A.D.⁵⁶

According to the traditions recorded by the Tibetan monk Tārānātha, Yaśovarmanā of Kaṇauj invaded Vaṅga during the reign of Lalita Chandra⁵⁷. But some writers think that the king who opposed Yaśovarmanā was not Lalita Chandra, but a scion of the Khadga dynasty⁵⁸. The works *Gauḍavaho* cannot throw much light on it. But the text pays high tribute to the king and the people of Vaṅga who offered stiff resistance to Yaśovarmanā. The supremacy of Yaśovarmanā over Bengal was probably mere nominal than real and it was short-lived.

Like Vaṅga and Samatata, Gauḍa was also divided into a number of small kingdoms and had to face a series of troubles in the Post Śaśāṅka period. Most of the rulers were weak, unknown and even unidentified. Lack of a stable government brought disorder and confusion in the land. The penetration of the Chinese adventures under Wang-Linen-tse⁵⁹ made the position of eastern India critical.

Strong-tsan Gāmpo, the powerful ruler of Tibet sent a military assistance to the Chinese in the hour of their need⁶⁰. He is said to have conquered Āssam and a large part of India with their help. The Tibetan invasion, however, was short-lived and the Indian states threw off the rule in or about 702 A.D. But the menace of Tibetan invasion played an important part in the politics of North-Eastern India for a long time.

The Later Guptas of Magadha were reinstated on the throne by Harsha after the death of Śaśāṅka and they seem to have held some control over a part of Bengal after the passing away of Bhāskaravarmanā's family. From the *Apsadha Inscription*⁶¹ we come to know the name of Ādityasena of this dynasty who enjoyed over-lordship over a part of Bengal. He and his successors ruled over a part of Bengal in the later part of the 7th century A.D. and at the beginning of the 8th century A.D.

From the *Rāgholi Copper Plate Inscription*⁶² we come to know

about Jayavardhana of the Śaila dynasty. From this inscriptions it appears that the original home of the rulers of the dynasty was in the valley of the Himalayas. Later on, they spread to the east and one of the branches of the dynasty established its suzerainty at Paundra.

The distracted condition of Gauḍa and Vaṅga encouraged the neighbours to invade Bengal. The invasions of Strong-Tsan-Gāmpo and the Chinese adventurers have already been referred to. The Khadgas and Śailas were not the original inhabitants of Bengal. They came from outside. The political condition of Gauḍa and Vaṅga also encouraged Yaśovarman of Kaṇauj and Lalitāditya of Kāśhmīr to invade the land.

From *Gauḍavaho* written by Vākpati, we come to know about the invasion of Yaśovarman who defeated and killed the ruler of Gauḍa during the time of his military campaigns against the rulers of Northern India⁶³. Vākpati also narrates the victory of Yaśovarman over the king of Vaṅga. His conquest of Bengal approximately took place between 725 and 735 A.D.

In spite of his victory, Yaśovarman could not maintain his suzerainty over Gauḍa and Vaṅga for a long time. He had to accept defeat at the hands of Lalitāditya of Kāśhmīr before the close of the first half of the 8th century A.D.⁶⁴

From the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*⁶⁵, we come to know about the invasion of Lalitāditya, the king of Kashmir. During the time of his Digvijaya (expeditions) he received the co-operation of the defeated king of Gauḍa. Lalitāditya on his part invited the king of Gauḍa and promised his safety in presence of an image of Vishnu. But he murdered the king treacherously, which made the followers of late king revengeful, and they went to Kāśhmīr in disguise of pilgrims to murder Lalitāditya. They entered the temple of Viṣṇu Rāmasvāmin and broke the idol. They accepted a heroic death at the hands of the soldiers of Kāśhmīr. Kalhaṇa praises the courage and heroic actions of the soldiers of Gauḍa⁶⁶.

From Kalhaṇa we come to know about a romantic story about Jayapīḍā, the grandson of Lalitāditya, in connection with

his relation with Kalyāṇa Devī, a daughter of a feudal Lord of Puṇdra-varḍhana. Jayapiḍa, abandoned by his soldiers in the time of an expedition, took shelter at Puṇdravardhana. Subsequently he married Kalyāṇa Devī, a daughter of Jayanta. He defeated five chiefs of Gauḍa and made his father-in-law the suzerain of Gauḍa⁶⁷. Though the authenticity of the story can be challenged, it indicates the political divisions of Gauḍa, which at that time were ruled by local feudal Lords.

The Paśupati temple inscription of Jayadeva dated 759 A.D. (or 748 A.D.)⁶⁸ describes the invasion of Gauḍa by Harsha of the Bhagadatta dynasty. Harsha is said to have conquered Gauḍa, Odra, Kalinga and Kosala. He was the father-in-law of Jayadeva II, the Lichhavi King of Nepal. Harshadeva was probably a king of Kāmarupa. The successful invasion of Harshadeva is not supported by any other evidence. So the success of Harshadeva in Gauḍa is doubtful.

The lack of powerful rulers and stable government brought only disorder and confusion for the people of Bengal. The progress of the country had been hampered to a great extent. The social, economic and cultural life of the people had been affected very much; the growing anti-social activities of a section of people made the life of the common people miserable. To describe the dark period of Bengal, the *Khalimpur inscription of Dharmapāla* uses a very appropriate term *Mātsyanyāya*⁶⁹.

Tāranātha, the Tibetan writer describes the condition of Bengal in his works. He says there was no king ruling in the country⁷⁰.

The political disintegration of the country as stated before, must have encouraged the neighbouring states to invade Bengal. Bengal thus, faced a series of invasions in the *Mātsyanyaya* period. The people had to suffer untold miseries, But ultimately it had a good effect. It roused the political consciousness of the people. They realised that all their troubles were due to the absence of a strong central government which could be established only by the voluntary surrender of powers to one.

The growing political consciousness of the people

encouraged them to select Gopāla for the throne of Bengal, The selection was probably made by a group of leaders of independent ruling chiefs. It fulfilled the expectation of the people of Bengal. Gopāla founded the Pāla dynasty. It was during the time of the Pālas that Bengal was able to reach to a height of greatness and splendour, not dreamt of before.

The gradual Aryanisation of the land since the time of the Epic Age, the appearance of the two mighty *Janapadas*, viz. Gauda and Vanga in the post-Gupta period, the close connection of these *Janapadas* with the politics of Northern India and the attempt of Śaśāṅka to establish the supremacy of Gauḍa in the politics of Northern India went to make the period distinct and significant. Though Bengal had to face some adverse circumstances in the post Śaśāṅka period, it was the growing political consciousness of the people, the wisdom and sagacity of some ruling chiefs of Bengal that saved the land from disaster and destruction.

Śaśāṅka had sowed seeds in the minds of the people for setting up a powerful empire, the Pālas in later time fulfilled the dreams of the people. For this the pre-Pāla period may be called the period of seed time.

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- 12A. *C.B.I P-45*.
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37. Ganjam Copper Plate, *Epigraphia India*, Vol. VI, pp. 143
38. *Hiuen-Tsang-er Dekhā Bhārat* (Beng. Trans, by Premamoy Dasgupta) p. 108.
39. *The Harsha Charita* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa (by Mahamahopadhyaya P.V. Kane, published by Motilal Banarindass, New Delhi).

40. HAB. p. 60.
41. Ibid., p. 60. 4U.Ibid., p. 52.
42. The Harsha Charita, p. XXXV; HAB, p. 56.
- 42A. He (Harahavardhana) decided to march against the famous/ Soma. The powerful Vaisya king with a large army marched against the eastern country, against the excellent capital Pundra of the characterless man (pp. 721-723);quoted from *An Imperial History of India* by K.P. Jaiswal; *B I*, Vol. I, p. 480.
43. N.P. Chakravarty, *EP. Indica*; Ch XXX, p. 34.
44. *Hieueñ Tsang-arDekha Bharat* : (According in Hieueñ Tsang Sasanka died of some poisonous wounds or of Gangrene, p. 121)
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66. Ibid., p. 493,
67. Ibid., p. 494,
68. Ibid., p. 494,
69. *C B I*, p. 96, canto 6; The term "Matsyanyaya" refers to a state of lawlessness in society, in which the strong oppresses the weak, just as a big fish swallow a smaller one.
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(B) ANCIENT JANAPADAS OF BENGAL

The students of the history of ancient Bengal have to face great difficulty in finding out the names of the ancient principalities (*Janapadas*) of Bengal and their actual boundaries. For they were changed from time to time according to the political vicissitudes or by other circumstances. The frequent changes in the courses of rivers often extended or reduced the boundaries of these principalities. It has also made it difficult to find out the exact location of a place or a city. Many ancient cities and localities have not yet been identified for this reason.

In the early stage, like other parts of India, national feelings were not at work. With the accession of a strong and powerful ruler on the throne of a certain principality, its boundary might have been extended for the time being, but, certainly it could not be regarded as the permanent boundary line of the *Janapada*. For example, Gauḍa, during the reign of Śaśāṅka, included the major *Janapadas* of ancient Bengal (like Puṇḍravardhana, Karnasuvarṇa, Samatata and Tāmrālipta). But we cannot say that their borders were the actual boundary line of Gauḍa. Similar was the case with other *Janapadas*.

The main sources of information about the principalities of ancient Bengal are *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, the two great epics, viz. the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, the descriptions of the foreign writers like Periplus, Ptolemy, Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsang, I-Tsing and others, the Jain and Buddhist literatures, the literatures of the Pre-Gupta and Post-Gupta period, like *Arthaśāstra* of Kāuṭilya, the works of pāṇini and Patañjali, *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa, *Rājtaranginī* of Kalhaṇa, *Pavanadūta* of Dhoyee, *Rāmcharita* of Śandhyākara Nandi, *Harshacharita* of Bāṇabhatta etc. The Purāṇas like the *Matsyapurāṇa* and *Vāyupurāṇa*, the *Vṛihatsamhitā* and some later works like *Ārya Mañjuśrī Mūlakaḥ*,

Daśakumāra Charita and others throw light on this topic.

Inscriptions and prasastis like the *Mahāsthān inscription*, the *Vāppāghosha inscription*, the *Dudhapāni inscription*, the *Allahabad Prasasti* of Harishena, the *Āshrafpur Plate inscription*, the *Harahā inscription* of Īśānavarmaṇa etc are also regarded very important sources for the ancient Janapadas of Bengal. Though these prasastis and inscriptions were written in favour of the kings and they have a tendency to take recourse to exaggerations or suppression of facts, unpleasing to their patrons, they throw some light on the matter. They should be dealt with caution.

According to the Puranic tradition, North-Eastern India was divided into five principalities, viz, Aṅga, Vaṅga, Suhma, Puṇḍra and Kalinga. They were ruled by the five sons of Rishi Dīrghatamā by Sudeshṇa, the wife of King Bali¹. Among these five kingdoms Vaṅga, Suhma and Puṇḍra were in Bengal, Aṅga was in East Bihar while Kalinga was in Orissa.

Vaṅga : The name of Vaṅga is first mentioned in the *Aitāreya Brāhmaṇa*. The name is mentioned in the two great epics, viz, the *Rāmāyana*^{1A} and the *Mahābhārata*². But these literatures do not give much information about the exact location and boundaries of Vaṅga. From the later works it appears that the two rivers, viz, the Bhāgirathī and Brahmaputra, were respectively the Western: and Eastern boundaries of Vaṅga. To the north, it was bounded by Varendra and to the south it extended upto the shores of Bay of Bengal. According to some writers Vaṅga included some territory to the east of Brahmaputra such as Sylhet (of modern Bangladesh)³.

Kālidāsa in his work, *Raghuvṃśa* (canto IV-36)⁴ locates Vaṅga amidst the stream of the Gaṅgā (Ganga-Srotontara), though some of the works (like *Prajñāpāramitā*, the Jaina text) mentions Tāmralipta as a city of Vaṅga, the view is not free from doubt, for Tāmralipta was a distant place from Vaṅga. The rulers of Vaṅga might have extended their boundary upto Tamralipta for the time being but they could not maintain their suzerainty over Tāmralipta permanently. During the reign of Śaśāṅka, Tāmralipta was a part of Gauḍa.

Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that probably in the Gupta period Vaṅga was divided into two divisions and one of them was known as Nāvyavakāshikā⁵ (which included territories like Dacca and Faridpur districts of modern Bangladesh). The land enjoyed the facilities for navigation and the port of Nāvyavakāshikā was a rendezvous of merchants and businessmen⁶.

Samatāṭa : There was a close geographical link between Samatāṭa and Vaṅga, though the Vṛihatsaṁhitā, a work of the 6th century A.D., distinguishes Samatāṭa from Vaṅga⁷. In the *Allahabad Pillar Inscription* of Samudra Gupta (A-I)^{7A}, Samatata is described as the border kingdom and it was situated on the eastern border of the Gupta empire (eastern Bengal)^{7B}.

From the writings of Hiuen Tsang we come to know that the frontier of Samatāṭa reached upto the Bay of Bengal. He had come through Puṇḍravardhan and Karnaśuvārṇa. According to him the boundary of the capital is about 20 li⁸. Hiuen Tsang describes Samatāṭa as a low and moisty country⁹, that lay to the south of Kāmarūpa.

Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that if the identification of Rajabhata, king of Samatata, mentioned by the Chinese traveller, with Rajarajabhata of the Ashrafpur Plate be correct, then Samatata had a royal capital at Karmanta, twelve miles west of Comilla¹⁰.

From the description of Hiuen Tsang and other writers it appears that the southern districts of present Bangladesh had once been included in Samatata. From different sources so far available it is believed that the area of Samatata extended from the eastern bank of the Ganga (and that of the Bhagirathi) up to the estuary of the Meghna.

Harikela: From the 7th century A.D. we have the name of a principality called Harikela. I-Tsing, the Chinese traveller of the 7th Century A.D. describes Hārikela (O-li-Ki-lo) as the eastern most country of eastern India¹¹.

The name of Harikela is mentioned in the Rāmpāla copper Plate inscription of Śrī Chandra¹² and *Chittagang inscriptions* of Kāntideva. In the Chittagang inscription of Kāntideva Harikela

is described as a maṇḍala¹³. In the "*Ārya Mañjusū Mūlakalpa*"¹⁴ Harikela, Samatata and Vaṅga are mentioned as distinct localities. The *Rudrāksha Māhātmya* section of the Smṛiti work named *Kṛityasara* mentions the name of Harikela and the author comments that Harikela is Śrihaṭṭadeśa¹⁵.

The *Rāmpāla copper Plate inscriptions* of Sri Chandra says that Trailokyachandra, father of Śrichandra, was at first a king of Harikela and later became the king of Chandravīpa¹⁶.

From the evidences it can be presumed that Harikela was a neighbouring kingdom of Vaṅga in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. It was in the eastern most part of ancient Bengal, primarily denoting the region now known as Sylhet. Sometimes it denoted the coastal region of eastern Bengal. It also appears that the boundaries and political status of Harikela as an independent *Janapada* (principality) was changed according to political situations.

Chandravīpa: The Rāmpāla copper plate inscription of Śrichandra mentions the name of Chandradvīpa and of its ruler Trailokyachandra. A manuscript dated 1015 A.D. describes the famous Tārā image of Chandradvīpa¹⁷.

It is suggested by some scholars that this *Janapada* derived its name from the Chandra royal dynasty¹⁸. But the theory is not supported by other scholars like N.N. Dasgupta and P. C. Bagchi. N.N. Dasgupta holds the view that the traditional founder of the *Janapada* was Chandra-gomin and that the *Janapada* was named after him¹⁹. Dr. P.C. Bagchi thinks that Matsyendranātha lived in Chandradvīpa and the entire coastal region including the island of Sandwip was known as Chandradvīpa²⁰. He takes sandwip as Chandravīpa but the two names are mentioned as two separate units by Budhagupta²¹. Later on Dr. Bagchi comes to the conclusion that it was not a definite geographical name. The ancient colonisers of Bengal had brought distant and separate coastal regions under their control in the name of Chandradvīpa²².

Puṇḍravardhana : Puṇḍravardhana is mentioned in the two great epics, viz, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*; the *Digvijaya* section of the *Mahābhārata* describes the conquest of

Puṇḍravardhana by Bhīma²³. Puṇḍras (the inhabitants of Puṇḍravardhana) were described as Vrātya Kshatriyas.

From the Gupta epigraphs and the records of the Chinese travellers we come to know that a great portion of Northern Bengal and a part of modern Bangladesh had been known as Puṇḍravardhana in ancient times. The name of Pundravardhana is mentioned in the *Dāmodarpur copper Plate grants*²⁴. Hiuen Tsang visited the *Janapada* and describes it as Pun-na-fa-ta-na in his works²⁵.

The extent of Pundravardhana varied at different times. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that no part of Rāḍha had even been included in the Puṇḍravardhana²⁶, while Dr. R.C. Majumdar holds the view that the whole territory stretching from the eastern bank of Gaṅgā to the Koratoyā including the Rajsahi division, a part of the Dacca Division (of modern Bangladesh) and also a part of the present Presidency Division and Jalpaiguri division of West Bengal had once been included within Puṇḍravardhana²⁷.

The capital of Pundravardhana was Puṇḍranagara which is identified by some scholars with Mahāsthāngaḍ (near Bogra in present Bangladesh)²⁸. The capital was on the bank of the Karotayā. Another important city of Puṇḍravardhana was Koṭivarsha²⁹.

Suhma and Rāḍha : The name of Suhma is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. In the Digvijoy Chapter of the *Mahābhārata*^{29A} we find the name of Suhma which was conquered by Bhīma, the second Pāṇḍava, during the time of his victorious march against the rulers of eastern countries. Though the *Mahābhārata* distinguishes Suhmas from Tāmralipta, the *Daśakumāra Charita*, a later work includes Tāmralipta (Damālīpta) in the Suhma territory³⁰.

From the accounts of the Purāṇas and other ancient Indian literatures it appears that a part of West Bengal, mainly the greater portion of the present Burdwan division to the West of the Bhāgirathī was once known as Suhma. Dr. R. D. Banerjee thinks that Trivenī, Saptagrāma and Pāṇḍua were the heart of the Suhma country³¹.

Brahma (or Brahmattar) : Possibly a separate *Janapada* named Brahma (or Brahmattar) had been established on the West of Bhāgirathī in ancient time. It was a part of Rāḍha in later period. In the works of Dhoyee (*Pavandūta*), Suhma and Brahma, these two *Janapadas*, were described as situated on the west of Gangā³². From this works it appears that Brahma was on the north of Suhma. Bijaypur and Trivenī have been described as parts of Brahma. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that there should not be any doubt about the existence of Brahma (north of Suhma) in Rāḍha country in ancient period³³. The *Janapada* 'Prasumhna'^{33A} mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* might be identical with Brahma.

Rāḍha : Rāḍha was an ancient principality of Bengal. With the progress of time it became more prominent than Suhma. The term 'Suhma' gradually disappeared from the political history of Bengal. So far as we know, it was last mentioned in the *Pavandūta* by Dhoyee. The term 'Rāḍha' seemed to have become more and more popular. Gradually the term 'Rāḍha' became applicable to the land lying to the West of the Bhāgirathī. The region gave its name to the Rāḍha branch of the Brahmanas and Kayasthas of Bengal.

The *Ācharāṅga Sūtra*, the Jaina text, regards Subhabhūmi as a part of Rāḍha³⁴. Some writers think that Vijaya, who is said to have conquered Śrīlāṅkā, was an inhabitant of Lāḍha (Rāḍha or Latā) country while some other writers locate the Lāḍha (or Latā) country near Broach in Gujrat.

It is said that during the time of the visit of Mahāvīra, Rāḍha was divided into two parts, viz, Suhmabhūmi (Dakshina Rāḍha) and Vajjabhumi (Uttar Rāḍha). It is not unlikely that at least a part of Vajjabhumi lay beyond the limits of Bengal.

Vajjabhumi: Vajjabhumi is generally identified with Northern Rāḍha (modern Birbhum district and northern borders of the Burdwan district of West Bengal)^{34A}. From *Ācharāṅga Sūtra* we come to know that Mahāvīra visited the land during the time of his preachings of Jainism in Bengal.³⁵ The region was covered with forest. The Jain text describes it as a pathless country. The inhabitants were mostly non-Aryan and brutal in character.

From the available sources it may be presumed that once Vajjabhumi comprised the modern districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura and a part of Midnapore in West Bengal as well as the Rājmaḥal hills in the Santhal Parganas and some other districts of Eastern Bihar.

The three districts of Vajjabhumi, viz, Birbhum, Bankura and Midnapore in later times had been included in the Rāḍha country. Besides Birbhum district, the Kandi Sub-division of the Murshidabad district and a part of Katwa Sub-division of the Burdwan district had been included in Uttar-Rāḍha³⁶. The river Ajay was generally regarded as the boundary line between North and South Rāḍha.

Dakṣhiṇa Rāḍha : As noted above, the Rāḍhadesa was divided into two parts, viz, Uttar Rāḍha and Dakṣhiṇa (South) Rāḍha. The *Tirumalai inscription* of the 13th year of Rājendra Chola gives a description of the country³⁷. The Chola army entered the *Janapada* through Daṇḍabhukti (modern Danton in the Midnapore district).

Possibly another name of Dakṣhiṇa Rāḍha was Vardhamānbhukti. The *Probodh Chandrika* of Kṛishṇamishra and Chaṇḍīmaṅgala of Mukundarāma mention the two famous villages of Dakṣhiṇa Rāḍha viz, Bhurīśreṣṭhi and Damunya³⁸. Bhurīśreṣṭhi was the residence of the Śreṣṭhis (merchants) and was in the Howrah district, while Dāmuniyā, the birth place of Kavikana Mukundarāma was in the Burdwan district. It is said that the territory of Dakṣhiṇa Rāḍha embraced considerable portion of the present Burdwan division of West Bengal. Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that the southern boundary might have reached the Rupnārāyan and Western boundary might have extended beyond the Dāmodar, far into the Ārambagh Sub-division of the Hooghly district³⁹.

Gauḍa : The name of Gauḍa can be found in different works of ancient Indian writers. Kauṭilya, who was familiar with different *Janapadas* of Bengal, mentions the name of Gauḍa and her products in his work⁴⁰. Vātsyāyana, in his works 'Kāmasūtra' describes the habits and character of the men and women of

Gauḍa⁴¹. We also get information about Gauḍa from the works of Patañjali, Varāhamihira, Rājśekhara and Murārī.

Varāhamihira, in his *Vrihatsamhitā*, gives a hint about the location of Gauḍa. From him we come to know that at least three districts of West Bengal, viz, Murshidabad, Birbhum and West Burdwan had been included in Gauḍa. The *Vrihat-Samhitā* has distinguished Gauḍa from Puṇḍra and Tāmralipta as well as from Vanga and Samatāṭa. Gauḍa and Samatāṭa are sometimes used side by side. Gauda came into prominence from the time of Śaśāṅka.

A great portion of modern Bengal was included within the territory of Gauḍa. Probably from the time of Dharmapāla, the greatest ruler of the Pāla dynasty, the title 'Gauḍeśvara' was the official title of the reigning ruler of Bengal.

If the commentator of 'Kāmasūtra' is correct, Gauḍa had extended its boundary southwards as far as Kaliṅga

Karṇasuvarṇa was the capital of Gauḍa during the reign of Śaśāṅka⁴³. It is mentioned by Hi-uen-Tsang as Kie-lo-na-sufala-na⁴⁴. The ruins of Karṇasuvarṇa have been recently discovered at Rajbaridanga in the Murshidabad district⁴⁵. (near the modern Railway station Chiruti of the E.R.).

Tāmralipta : Tāmralipta (Tāmraliptika of Varāhamihira, Tamolipta of Mahāvamsa, Tāmraliptika of Rājśekhara) is not only a famous port, but also a *Janapada* of ancient Bengal.

The name of Tāmralipta is mentioned in the great epic, viz, the *Mahābhārata*,⁴⁶ associated with the legends of the warrior prince Tāmradhvaja, who gave battle to Arjuna by seizing the latter's horse of the Aśvamedha^{46A}. Its memory is contained in the *Mahābhārata*. This *Janapada* is mentioned in the *Ādiparva*, *Sabhāparva* and *Droṇaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*. Tāmralipta is mentioned in the two Ceylonese works, viz, *Dipavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa*^{46B}. Besides these works the Kathāsaritsigara, the Jaina works, the *Kalpa Sūtra* and other works of ancient Indian writers mention the name of Tāmralipta. Some inscriptions like Dudapāni inscriptions of Uḍaymanya also mention the *Janapada*^{46C}.

In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* Tāmralipta is placed near the eastern sea^{46D}. The *Daśakumāra Charita* describes Tāmralipta as a flourishing centre of trade and commerce. But the work describes Tāmralipta (Dāmalipta) as a part of Suhma⁴⁷.

This Janapada has been identified with present Tamluk on the right bank of the river Rupanārāyaṇ in Midnapore district⁴⁸. From the very ancient time, Tāmralipta was a famous port of Bengal which had a trade link with Ceylone, China and the eastern Archipelago, when Fa-Hien in the 5th century A.D. visited Tāmralipta. The port was situated at the sea-mouth⁴⁹. When Hiuen Tsang visited Tāmralipta in the 7th century A.D., Tāmralipta was both the name of a kingdom and a city, (consisting of a territory between 1400-1500 li)⁵⁰. Tāmralipta was then a coastal kingdom. The port was near an inlet of sea.

Though Tāmralipta once had been a part of Suhma, in later ages, it became an independent kingdom. Tāmralipta seem to have comprised a great part of the Midnapore district and in the days of Hiuen-Tsang it lay over 900 li (i.e. 150 miles) from Samatāṭa. From Hiuen Tsang we come to know that the land was low and moist, farming was good, fruits and flowers were abundant⁵¹.

The river Kapiśā (modern Kāmsāvatī or Kānsai) separated Tāmralipta from Utkala. Besides these famous *Janapadas*, we find mention of some smaller *Janapadas* like Dāvāka (mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta), Pattikerā (mentioned in a manuscript of *Ashtasahasra Prajñā Pāramitā* of 1015 A.D.), Ka-Jaṅgala (in the works of Hiuen Tsang), Daṇḍabhukti (in the *Idra inscriptions of Nayapāla*) and others.

Dāvāka is mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta. It can be presumed that it was situated in eastern Bengal (between Samatāṭa and Kāmarūpa)^{51A}. But it is difficult to find out the exact location of Dāvāka.

Ka-jaṅgala is mentioned by Hiuen Tsang as Ki-a-chu-hoho-khi-lo in his works⁵². It was about 400 li from Champā. The land was plain and fertile. But it was not an independent state when Hiuen Tsang visited the principality.

Daṇḍabhukti is mentioned in the Midnapore inscription Śaśānka⁵³ which was then ruled by a provincial governor named Samadatta. The Tirumālai inscription of RajendraaChola describes the conquest of Daṇḍabhukti by Rājendra Chola after his conquest of Oddabishaya and Kośalainadu (South Kośala)⁵⁴. Probably Daṇḍabhukti came into prominence after the fall of Tāmralipta.

The existence of different *Janapadas* in ancient Bengal indicates that Bengal was not politically united in the early period. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that these *Janapadas* were named after the tribes, not after their Kings⁵⁵. The *Janapadas* had been established by different tribes (Komas). Puṇḍravardhana had been named after the Puṇḍras (or Pauṇḍras). His view indicates the supremacy of different native tribes in different parts of Bengal. The term Bengal (Bangla or Vaṅga) was not known to them. The people of the land might have maintained an economic and cultural relation with each other but they had no political unity for which the idea of greater Bengal could not arise in the minds of the people in the early time.

Though the powerful rulers of Vaṅga and Gauḍa (like Śaśānka) tried to bring about a political unification of the land, they achieved little success. The geographical barriers, the racial and cultural differences of the people of different parts of Bengal stood on the way of unification. The desire for freedom always encouraged them to resist foreign invasions and to maintain their separate identity. It was only under the Pālas that Bengal first came under one political sway.

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C. ADMINISTRATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIALS OF ANCIENT BENGAL

We have no definite information about the system of administration prevailing in Bengal before the 4th century A.D. From the two great epics and the legends preserved in later literatures we come to know that monarchy was the prevailing form of government.

The Aryans could not invade the land before the accession of Chandragupta Maurya on the throne of Magadha. The Purāṇas regarded the rulers of Bengal as Śūdras. But inspite of the bitter attitude of the writers of the Purāṇas, the recent archaeological discoveries suggest that Bengal had developed a powerful political organisation before the penetration of the Aryan people in the land¹.

After the accession of Chandragupta Maurya on the throne of Magadha, the political situation of Eastern India (as well as Northern India) had changed. A great part of Bengal had to acknowledge the suzerainty of Magadha; the administrative system of the Mauryas had been introduced in the Maurya dominated areas of Bengal. But for the lack of sufficient documents we have no clear idea about the system introduced by the Mauryas in Bengal.

For the Maurya rule we have the *Mahāsthān* inscription², the single epigraphic record, through which we can learn the beneficent activities of Aśoka, the great emperor of the dynasty. The inscription refers to the grant of paddy and probably also of money to the people, by way of loan in order to relieve the distressed people in times of famine. This inscription refers to the government store-house (*Koṭhāgole*) being provided with grains for the relief of the people when they faced natural disasters like famine or flood. This store-house was probably built according to the instructions of the Arthaśāstra.

After the end of the Maurya rule, Bengal restored her independence. But, the land was not politically united. The contemporary literatures of Northern India cannot throw any light on the system of administration of Bengal.

Since the time of Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty Bengal began to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Gupta rulers of Magadha. Different inscriptions of the Gupta rulers like *Dhanāidaha copper Plate Inscriptions*, *Baigrām copper Plate Inscriptions*, *Dāmodārpur Copper Plate Inscriptions* of Kumārgupta I, *Pahādpur Copper Plate Inscription of Budhagupta* etc, throw much light on the administrative system of Bengal during the time of the Guptas.

From these copper plate Inscriptions we come to know that the whole of Bengal was not directly administered by the Gupta emperors. Large slices of territory were ruled by local feudal chiefs called *Mahāsāmanta* and *Maharāja*.

The territory directly ruled by the Gupta emperor was divided into a number of well defined units, viz. *Bhukti*, *Vishaya*, *Maṇḍala*, *Vithi*, *Grāma* and other minor sub-divisions.

The two administrative units, viz. *Bhukti* and *Vishaya* were somewhat similar to that of the Divisions and districts respectively of modern times. The ruler of *Bhukti* was called *Uparika* (or *Uparika Mahārāja*) and the ruler of *Vishaya* was called *Kumārāmātya* or *Vishayapati*. The lowest administrative unit was village and there were intermediate units like *Vithis*, *Maṇḍalas* etc.

Each of these administrative units had its own office to conduct the business of the unit smoothly. Some officials were appointed to assist the head of the unit. Some changes were noticed in later period.

Another important feature of the administration was that even villages and other smaller units enjoyed and exercised some important power and authority.

It is already noted that *Upārika* (who assumed the title of *Uparika Mahārāja* in later times) was the ruler of *Bhukti*. He was directly appointed by the King-emperor who styled himself as

Rājputra Devabhaṭṭāraka, evidently either a prince or a member of the imperial family.

The *Uparika* was directly responsible for the administration of the Bhukti. From the *Mallasarūl Inscription* of Gopa-Chandra³ (of the Post-Gupta period) we get the name of some important administrative officials of the *Bhuktis*. It mentions the officers serving in the *Adhikaraṇas* under the *Uparika* of *Vardhamāna Bhukti*. They were *Bhogapatika Paṭṭalaka*, *Chauradharanika*, *Avasathika*, *Hiranyasamudayika*, *Audraṅgika*, *Aurnasthānika*, *Devadroni-Sambadha Kartākritika*, *Agrahārika*, *Tadayuktaka*, *Vāhananayaka*, *Kumārāmātya* etc.

The *Kumārāmātya* was the district officer. Dr. R.D. Banerjee thinks that *Kumārāmātya* was equal in rank to the heir apparent⁵. But from some copper Plate Inscriptions it appears that *Kumārāmātya* was a class of officials who were directly under the King or the crown prince. Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that the term probably refers to a class of officials who had enjoyed hereditary right to get appointment to a high office of the state⁶. *Tadayukta* was possibly appointed by the *Uparika* and he enjoyed almost the same status and power as that of the *Vishayapati*. *Kartākritika* was probably the superintendent of the state handicrafts department. He might be also the head of the Public works department. *Bhoga* was a kind of tax and probably *Bhogapati* was a tax-collector. *Chauraddharanika* was a high ranking Police official who maintained the law and order of the land. *Avasthika* was the caretaker of the royal palace and other government buildings including temples, resting places etc. *Hiranyasamudayika* was probably collector of taxes. *Audrangika*⁷ collected a tax called *Udranga* from the permanent tenants. *Aurna-ssthānika*⁸ was incharge of silk and woolen products. *Agrahārika* was the supervisor of *Agrahāra* land (land offered to the Brāhmaṇas as free-gifts for some religious purposes). *Vahananayaka* supervised the traffic and the communication system.

It is already mentioned that *Kumārāmātya* or *Vishayapati* was in charge of a *Vishaya* (district). He, sometimes, assumed the title *Ayuktaka* and was generally appointed by the *Uparika Mahārājā*

But the *Baigrām plate*⁹ refers to the *Bhaṭṭāraka*, the king emperor as the appointing authority. Though it is difficult to explain the anomaly of the *Baigrāmplate*, it can be presumed that *Kumāramātya* was sometimes appointed by the king on the advice or recommendation of the governor of the *Bhukti* or division¹⁰.

The task of administering a *Vishaya* was entrusted to the *Kumāramātya*. From the *Dāmodarpur Coppe plate* Inscriptions we come to know that the *Kumāramātya* of *Kotivarsha* had a regular *Adhikaraṇa* (or collectorate office) situated in an *Adhiṣṭhāna* (town)¹¹. A number of officers worked under him and among the officials *Pustapālas* (record keepers) played an important role in the transactions of land sales. Whenever a request was made to the *Vishayapati* (*Kumāramātya*) for buying a land, it was referred to the office of the *Pustapālas*. He had to make a thorough enquiry about the position of the land and report it to the *Vishayapati*. The *Vishayapati* might have given the consent if the office of the *Pustapālas* raised no objection, But the *Vishayapati* made consultations with some important officials and men of the locality before the transaction could take place.

From the *Damodarpur Copper Plate* Inscription of *Kumāragupta*¹² we also come to know that his *Adhikaraṇa* of *Koṭivarsha* was aided by a Board of Advisers, consisting of the *Nagaraśreṣṭhin* (the most wealthy man of the town), representing the rich urban population, the *Prathama Sārthavāhas* (the chief merchant; representing the various artisan classes), the *Prathama Kāyastha* (the chief Secretary), representing the *Kāyasthas* or government officials), and the *Prathama Kulika*.

The existence of an advisory body consisting of four members is undoubtedly an interesting feature in the whole system of the administration. The four members were to represent the interest of the different communities. They enjoyed some special rights and privileges in the administration. They were not mere advisers. Though at present, it is difficult to find out their constitutional or legal position, it can be said that they exercised some authority over the sale of lands. From the versions

of *Nārada Smṛiti* and *Dharmasūtra* we come to know that the *Prathama Kāyastha* was an ex-officio member, while the other three, viz., *Nagara Sresthin*, *Prathama Kulika* and *Prathama Sārthavāha* were elected members of their community or guilds; they were not directly appointed by the *Vishayapati*. The system undoubtedly recognised the rights of different communities to represent and control the local administration.

The *Vishaya* or district was subdivided into *Maṇḍalas*, *Vithis* and villages. Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that there were other minor subdivisions or smaller units in the administrative system¹³. He also thinks that *Vishaya* and *Maṇḍala* were sometimes used as synonymous; a *Vishaya* was sometimes included in a *Maṇḍala* and sometimes the case was just the opposite¹⁴. Dr. N.R. Roy holds a different view. He says that only one reference of a *Maṇḍala* can be found in the *Dāmodarpur Copper Plate*¹⁵. In the *Pāhāḍpur Plate* the term *Maṇḍala* can be found with the term *Vithi* side by side. He thinks that *Maṇḍala* was a smaller administrative unit and it was placed under *Vishaya*¹⁶.

It is difficult to give the exact definition of a *Vithi* in the Gupta Age. In later times it indicated a sub-division of a *Vishaya*. The lowest administrative unit was a *Grāma*.

Besides these we have the terms of some smaller administrative units like *Khāṇḍala*, *Avritthi*, *Bhāga*, *Chaturakas* and *Pāṭakas*¹⁷. It is difficult to find out their actual definition. Possibly these terms were used for the purpose of revenue collection.

For the Post-Gupta period we have the *Faridpur Inscriptions of Dharmāditya*, *Mallasārul Inscriptions of Gopachandra*, *Vāppāghoshavaṭa Inscriptions of Jayanaga*, *Āshrafpur Inscriptions of Devakhadga*, *Tipperā Copper Plate Inscriptions of Lokenātha* etc. which throw light on the administrative system of the Post-Gupta period.

Vithi-From the *Mallasārul Inscription* we come to know that *Vithi* was a smaller unit and something like a sub-division of *Vishaya*^{17A}. Scholars like N.G. Majumdar suggest that *Vithi* denoted a tract of land bordering on a river¹⁸. Though he makes the conclusion from some copper plate Inscriptions we are not sure how far his conclusion is true. It can be regarded as a smaller

unit of *Vishaya*. There are specific reference to the *Adhikaraṇa* for a *Vithi*, which consisted of *Mahattaras*, *Khaḍgis* and at least one *Vaha-nayaka*. The *Vithis* enjoyed the same power with the *Vishayādhikaraṇas* in respect of selling land. In the *Mallasārul Inscriptions* an officer titled *Kulberkrita* is mentioned. Possibly he distributed the money, collected from selling of land; according to the instructions of the *Adhikaraṇas*, *Vithis* came into prominence in the post-Gupta period.

It is already noted that the lowest administrative unit was village. There were same villages with names ending in *Agrahāra* which seemed to have enjoyed much higher status. We have little knowledge about the administration of a village. In some inscriptions like *Dāmodarpur Inscriptions* (No. 3)¹⁹ we find the name of an official *Grāmika*. He was the head of the village administration. He conducted the administration with the help of the leaders like *Brāhmaṇa*, *Mahattara*, *Kutumba* etc. of the village²⁰. Probably the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Mahattaras*, *Prativasis* etc, acted as the advisers of the local administration.

In some villages there existed a greater administrative machinery, Besides them there existed *Grāmika* and an *Adhikaraṇa* named as the *Kulādhikaraṇa*²¹, consisting of eight headmen of the village. In some inscriptions there are reference to *Pañchakulas*²². It can be presumed that the *Pañchakulas* took some responsibility in the local administration. Probably *Pañchakulas* were similar to that of the *Pañchayet* system and *Ashṭakula* was a local body consisting of eight important men of the village.

From the above mentioned inscriptions it appears that people had some important share in the local administration. The rulers couldn't neglect their opinions. They were to make consultations with the representatives of different communities before the transaction of lands and in other important matters. In the urban areas the representatives of different guilds and in the rural areas the people engaged in cultivation had some rights and the administrators had to give them recognition. The *Grāmika* could not sanction a land to a new-comer without the consent of

the village assembly. But the system had been changed in the *Pāla* period. The ruler at that time became the actual owner of the land and he could even donate a village for the purpose of religious worship.

Some important changes in the field of administration took place in the Post-Gupta period. A number of independent rulers appeared in Bengal. They administered their kingdoms according to their own will and did not follow the machinery set up by the Gupta rulers. Under their rule the bureaucracy had been gaining its strength gradually. The *Mallasārul copper Plate inscriptions* clearly present the growing strength of the bureaucracy (ins.A.19)²³. The independent rulers had also feudal chiefs. They were called *Sāmantas*. The term '*Sāmanta*' can be found in the records of Samāchardeva, Devakhaḍga and Jayanāga.

Besides *Sāmanta* the names of some important new officials like *Adhiṣṭhānādhi Karana* (district officers) and *Sandhivigrahika* (Minister of peace and war) can be found in the *Dāmodarpur Plates* (A.6,7,9,10) and *Tipperā Copper Plates of Lokenāth* respectively²⁴. These officials carried out the order of their sovereigns to maintain law and order and to declare war or peace.

The appearance of powerful feudal chiefs (*Sāmanta*) must have brought a change in the nature of administration. It indicated the growing strength of feudalism. The *Mallasārul Inscriptions* mention Mahārājā Vijayasena, who was actually a *Sāmanta* but used his own seal and communicated his orders to the officials serving under him directly. The growing strength of these *Sāmantas* and the lack of powerful rulers made the monarchy weak. It helped to establish a number of small independent principalities, which brought a confusion in the *Mātsyanyāya* period.

References :

1. H A B, p. 286.
2. C B I, pp. 39-40.
3. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

4. Ibid., pp. 90-94.
5. Banerje, R.D., *Imperial Guptas*, p. 71
6. *H A B*, p. 323.
7. Ghosal, U.U., *Hindu Revenue System*, p. 210.
8. *Indian Culture*, Vol. VI, p. 160.
9. *C. B. I*, p. 50.
10. *H A B*, p. 289.
11. Ibid., p. 290.
12. *C B I*, pp. 45-46.
13. *H A B*, p. 294.
14. Ibid., p. 294.
15. *B I*, p. 433.
16. Ibid., p. 433.
17. *H A B*, p. 294.
- 17A. *CBI*, pp. 87-90.
18. Majumdar N G. *Epigraphia India XXXIII*, p. 158.
19. *C B I*, p. 59, "Rana Gramika, Kutumbenascha Chandra Gramake ... (the Rana Gramika, Kutumas, Royal officials of Chandragrama...)"
20. *B I*, Vol. I, p. 422.
21. Ibid., p. 421.
22. Ibid., p. 421.
23. *CB I*, pp. 90-94.
24. Quoted from the works of Roy Nihar Ranjan Vol. I, p. 426.

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE : VARNA, CASTE AND ITS VARIOUS ASPECTS

A student of history should be acquainted with the social structure of ancient Bengal if he wants to have some idea about the socio-religious life of Bengal. In spite of its cultural link with Northern India from the very early times, the socio-religious structures of Bengal were to a great extent different from that of the other parts of Northern India. Here the influences of the non-Aryan tribes like Western Brachycephalus, Proto-Australoids were much greater than that felt in Northern India. These non-Aryan elements exercised considerable influence over the present structure of the caste system.

Our main sources of information for social history are the Smṛitikāras of Northern India like Manu, Baudhāyana and others, and Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*. The inscriptions of the rulers of ancient Bengal also give us valuable informations in this respect. The literary texts like *Rājataroṅginī*, *Kāmasūtra*, *Bṛihad Dharma Purāṇa*, *Ballāla Charita* and *Kulaji Granthamālās* throw light on the existing caste system and the social life of Bengal. Through these works we can have some definite idea about the gradual development of the social structures (as well as the social life) of Bengal.

Bengal had maintained its separate identity for a long time. The Aryans had established their supremacy in the field of socio-religious life as far eastwards as Mithilā (or Videha) in the Vedic Age and Bengal was inhabited by different non-Aryan tribes of culture about whom we know very little. Though a part of Bengal had been annexed to the Maurya empire, the rest of Bengal remained free from the rule of the Mauryas. It was during the time of the Guptas that Bengal had acknowledged the suzerainty of Magadha and the systematic Aryanisation of Bengal had been

started. The Vedic Aryans looked down upon the people of Eastern India. In the *Aitāreya Brāhmaṇa* (7-33) the native tribes of Northern Bengal like Puṇḍras, Andhras, Śābaras, Pulindas etc. are described as Dasyu (Bandits) and the Smṛitikāras like Manu, Baudhayāna etc put restrictions on visiting the land.

But inspite of their restrictions the monks, leaders of different religious institutions (like Gautama Buddha, Vardhamāna Mahāvira), merchants etc. began to visit the land for different purposes and the gradual infiltrations of the Aryan and their settlements in Bengal brought a great change in the socio-cultural life of Bengal.

One of earliest planned steps of Aryanisation was to bring the indigenous tribes of Bengal within the framework of the Aryan society¹. For this purpose recognition was given to the local Gods and Goddesses like Chaṇḍī, Pañchāṇanda etc and to the rituals and practices of the non-Aryan tribes of Bengal. The Aryan society accepted the indigenous tribes of Bengal like the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas, the Śābaras, the Pulindas, the Kīrātas and the Puṇḍras as Vrātya Kshatriyas². A number of native people, engaged in religious worship and rituals, were raised to the rank of Brāhmaṇas. The story of Dīrghatamā and Sudeshṇā seems to indicate that intermarriage between the immigrant Brāhmaṇas and the native people was not unknown to them. Possibly, a large number of native tribes, who could not secure the favour of the Aryan society, were ultimately declared as Śūdras³. The *Manusmṛiti* (x44) describes that though the Puṇḍrakas and Kīrātas were originally Kshatriyas, they were degraded owing to their inability to observe the rites and practices of the Brāhmaṇical society properly. Some other castes (or tribes) might have faced the same situation. It can be said that the caste system of Bengal had been developed through a long and tedious process. Probably in the initial stage it was not very rigid. It must have required centuries to take the final shape.

Possibly, before the advent of the Aryans different native tribes (like Bāgdis, Kaivartas, Puṇḍrakas etc.) had been living along with other native tribes in different parts of Bengal. From

the old inscriptions it is learnt that Bāgdis constituted the bulk of the population of the Rāḍha Country while the Puṇdrakas and Kaivartas were the main inhabitants of Puṇdravardhana (Puṇdravardhana was named after the Puṇdrakas).

The two great epics, and the Buddhist and Jain literatures narrate the continuous attempts of the Aryan society to establish their supremacy over the soils of Bengal. In the *Sabdhāparva* of the Mahābhārata, Bhīma, the second Pāṇḍava is said to have defeated the kings of Suhma, Prasumha, Puṇdra Tāmralipta etc who ruled in different parts of Vaṅgadesha and presented gifts to the Brāhmaṇas of these places⁴. Vātsyāyaṇa in his works, also refers to the Brāhmaṇas of Gauḍa and Vanga. The leaders of the Buddhist and Jaina schools began to visit the land from the 6th century B.C. in order to preach their religious ideas.

The conquest of Bengal by the Guptas was an epoch making event in the socio-religious history of Bengal. It had opened the door of Bengal for the Brāhmanical school of Northern India.

From the inscriptions of the Gupta period it appears that the Gupta rulers encouraged the spread of Brāhmaṇism in Bengal. They began to donate lands to the Brāhmaṇas. From this time the Smārta rites and Puranic worship had been introduced all over Bengal. A large number of temples of different Gods and Goddesses of the Brahmanical cult had been built up. People of Northern India began to visit the temples.

From these inscriptions we come to know that *Brāhmaṇas* came to Bengal from different parts of India and they were well conversant with the performance of the Vedic rites and Yajñas. They, generally, used to bear titles like Śarmā and Svāmins. Probably the practice of addressing themselves by a particular gāin-names had been introduced in Bengal about the 6th and 7th century A.D.⁵ (the gāin-names were the names of the villages where they settled down at first). Besides Śarmā and Svāmins, the Brāhmaṇas of the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods used some other surnames like Chaṭṭa, Bhaṭṭa, Banda, Bṛihat Chaṭṭa etc^{5A}. Most of the names were derived from Sanskrit words,

though the indigenous names were not very uncommon. We also find some surnames for the Non-Brahmins of Bengal. They were Datta, pāl, Mitra, Nandi, Nandi-Varman, Dās, Bhadra, Sen, Pālit, Dev, Nāg, Chandra, Dām etc. These surnames are very common to the Bengalis of to-day. Though there is no doubt that these were surnames, sometimes the people used them as a part of their names⁶. But it is difficult to say whether name - ending in same cases such as Bandhu-Mitra, Dhṛitipāla, Chirātadatta etc. were surnames or part of name.

It is already noted that the process of Aryanisation which had been started from the time of the Guptas had to take a long time to give a final shape⁷. From the literary and epigraphic evidences it appears that the social development took place more or less on the same line as the rest of Northern India. Dr. R.C. Majumdār thinks that even during the long reign of the Pālas, who belonged to Buddhist School, the caste system was up-held by the Kings⁸.

The most striking feature of the social structure of the Gupta and the Post-Gupta period was the existence of a number of castes and Sub-castes in Bengal. The Aryan society had been divided into four Varnas, viz. Brāhmaṇa, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Śūdra. But when the systematic Aryan settlement took place in Bengal, it had become a mere theory. The people engaged in different professions were placed in the society according to their professions and status. The racial and tribal factors were also at work; the native tribes had been engaged in different professions. For these Bengal witnessed the emergence of a number of castes and sub-castes which had no existence outside Bengal. Inter-caste marriage might have given rise to additional castes and sub-castes. In this connection it can be reminded that inspite of the restrictions of the *Smṛitikāras*, the Hindu society could not stop the inter-caste marriages. The *Smṛitikāras* ultimately had to recognise inter-caste marriages, and the political and religious leaders of Bengal, realising the practical situation (as well as changed circumstances), gave recognition to different castes and sub-castes in their social life. The caste system of Bengal might

have been different if they believed otherwise or followed the instructions of the Smṛitikāras of Northern India strictly.

Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that the names and number of the castes and sub-castes varied according to time and localities⁹. The Smṛitikāras of Bengal could not neglect the local conditions, when these castes and sub-castes had been developed. The *Bṛihad Dharma Purāṇa*, a work of about 12th century A.D. considering the peculiar conditions of Bengal, gives permission to the Brāhmaṇas to eat fish and meat. The text divides the non-Brāhmaṇa population into thirty six castes and they are all described as Śūdras¹⁰. The *Bṛihad Dharma Purāṇa* refers to the unions of different castes and the origin of mixed castes in Bengal. It divides the castes into three categories, viz. Uttama Śāṅkara, Madhyama Śāṅkara and Adhama Śāṅkara, all having the status of Śūdras.

The Brāhmaṇas: Since the time of the Mauryas the cultural and social institutions of the Aryans began to develop in Bengal, but they received a new impetus from the time of the Guptas. The Brāhmanical School of Northern India had been encouraged to establish its supremacy over the soils of Bengal. From different copper plate inscriptions (like *Dāmodarpur Copper Plate Inscriptions*) of the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods we come to know that the rulers, high administrative officials and local chiefs began to donate lands for the settlement of the Brāhmaṇa families. It is also learnt that from different parts of India like Lātā (Gujarat), Madhyadeśa and localities like Kolancha (Krodanchi or Krodanjan), Tārakari (in Śravastī), Kuktavastu, Hastipada, Matsya Vasa etc the Brahmana families came to Bengal for permanent settlement. The above mentioned inscriptions also tell us that the Brāhmaṇas who settled down in different parts of Bengal were well versed in the Vedas.

From the Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscriptions of Bhāskara-Varmaṇa of Kāmarūpa, we come to know that Bhūti-varmaṇa, great grandfather of Bhāskaravarmana, donated lands to two hundred and five Brāhmaṇas, belonging to different Vedic

Brāhmaṇical schools at Mauyraśālmala Agarahāra¹¹. These Brāhmaṇas belonged to Vājasaneyī, Chhāndogya, Bahnubachya, Charakya and Taittirīya Vedic Schools.

The eagerness to donate lands to the well versed Brāhmaṇas can be found in different inscriptions. The *Mallasārul Inscriptions of Vijayasena* describes the donation of lands by Vijayasena to a Brahmin name Vatsyaswāmi (of the Rig Vedic clan) to perform the Pañcha Mahā Yajña. The two Medinipur Inscriptions of Śaśāṅka indicate the extension of Varṇāśrama system of Brāhmaṇism upto Daṇḍabhukti (modern Danton) within the first half of the 7th century A.D. The inscriptions of Dharmāditya and Samāch'āradeva also narrate the donation of land to the Brāhmaṇas of different schools in Eastern Bengal.

From the inscriptions of the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods we learn that the Brāhmaṇas who came to Bengal at these periods, mostly belonged to five schools, viz. the Vājasaneyī, Chhāndogya, Bahnubachya, Charakya and Taittirīya schools. The Vājasaneyī had formed the majority. Most of the immigrants used to bear the sur-names 'Sharmā' and 'Swāmi'¹². A well organised Brahmanical society had grown up in north-eastern Bengal by the first half of the 6th century A.D.

The donation of lands and other facilities offered to the Brāhmaṇas must have encouraged the Brāhmaṇas of the rest of India to settle down in Bengal in large numbers, which ultimately strengthened the foundation of the Brāhmaṇical school of Bengal since the time of the Guptas. Some religious scuffles between Buddhism and Brāhmaṇism might have taken place in Bengal during the reign of Śaśāṅka. But it was an exception, The political conflict between Northern India and Gauḍa might have created the tension. Otherwise Buddhism, Jainism and Brāhmaṇism lived side by side peacefully in Bengal. There is no evidence that the Buddhists and Jains of Bengal had assumed a bitter attitude against the Brāhmaṇical school. The rulers of the Gupta and the Post Gupta periods, inspite of their patronage of Brāhmaṇism, recognised the rights and privileges of the Buddhist and Jain

people and their monasteries. They also received land grants from the rulers¹³.

In the subsequent period the Brāhmaṇas of Bengal had been divided mainly into three groups, viz. the Rāḍhiyas, Varendras and Vaidikas. It can be presumed that the three sects had become very prominent in Bengal in the Sena period. In this connection the Kulajis can be mentioned here which narrate the Ādiśūra episode.. It is said that Ādiśūra of the Śūra dynasty brought five Brāhmaṇas from Kaṇauj. They, in course of time, either on account of internal dissensions or by royal orders, began to live in different parts of Bengal as Rāḍhiya or Vareṇdra, as they lived in Rāḍhadeśa or Vareṇdrabhūmi at that time.

Most of the scholars are not willing to accept the authenticity of the Ādiśūra episods. The Kulajis do not mention the exact time of his rule and his relation with Vallālasena. It may be presumed that the Brāhmaṇas who settled in Rāḍhadeśa for a long time ultimately came to be known as Rāḍhiyas and the Brāhmaṇas of Varen-drabhumi as Vārendras. The Vaidikas (who were also divided into two groups, viz, Dākshinātya; and Pāśchātya) had not settled down in a particular region of Bengal. The customs and practices of the Vaidikas were different and they were generally looked down upon by the Rāḍhiyas and Varendras. Even a rivalry had started between the Rāḍhiyas and Vārendras for supremacy in later times. The intermarriages between these two groups were not favoured by the conservative leaders of these two groups. Besides these, in the Sena period there existed a minor school known as Śākadvīpi (or Graha-vipra); probably, they came in the Post-Gupta period. But these divisions of the Brāhmaṇas took place in later time, the inscriptions and literatures of the Gupta and Post Gupta period do not mention any such divisions. From the inscriptions it is also clear that there were no dearth of Brāhmanas well versed in the Vedas in Bengal in the Gupta and Post Gupta Periods. Lands were donated to the pious and learned Brāhmaṇas so that they could cultivate learning peacefully. Another interesting feature is that there existed no Vaṅgaja Brāhmaṇa school in Bengal. Probably the native

Brāhmaṇas of Bengal realising the growing importance of the immigrant Brāhmaṇas in their land did not try to maintain their separate identity.

P. L. Paul suggests that after the fall of the Hindu power in Gauḍa, many Brāhmaṇas migrated to the neighbouring Hindu kingdom of eastern Bengal. The Rāḍhiyas and Vārendras had established the supremacy in the social life of eastern Bengal and the earlier Brāhmaṇical population was absorbed in their society, while some scholars (like D.C. Sarkar)¹⁵ think that the artificial increase in the number of the Rāḍhiya Brāhmaṇas and the absence of Vaṅgaja Brāhmaṇas were due to the extra-ordinary favour extended to the Rāḍhiyas by the Sena Kings of Bengal.

A remarkable feature of the Bengali community is that it did not follow the general rules of the Vedic caste system. The Kshatriya and Vaiśya communities are not found in Bengal. Though in the early inscriptions we find the terms like Nagara-Śreṣṭhins, Sārtha-Vāhas, Vyāparī (merchants) etc., the people who used to bear these surnames did not claim themselves as Vaiśyas. R. P. Chanda in his works '*Indo-Aryan Races*' says that Bengal had not followed the social structure of the Vedic Aryan people in toto. It can be guessed that in spite of the acceptance of the Aryan culture, people of Bengal were eager to maintain their separate identity and they established a distinct social structure. The Kshatriya and Vaiśya communities might have come to Bengal along with the Brāhmaṇas in the Gupta and Post Gupta periods, but they could not exercise much influence on the social life of Bengal; they might have been merged in other communities in course of time. Probably, the economic activities of the people, the existing socio-religious institutions and other circumstances had exercised much influence to build up a distinct social structure for the people of Bengal. The Kshatriya and Vaiśya communities had failed to secure a room for themselves in the existing social structure of Bengal.

Karaṇa-Kāyāsthā: The Karaṇa Kayāsthas had secured an important position in the social life of the people of Bengal.

From the inscriptions of ancient Bengal (like the *Gunāigarh*

inscriptions of Vainya Gupta, Tippara Copper Plate Inscriptions of Lokenātha etc.) we come to know about a class of officials called Kāyaśthas. We know also the names of officials like Prathama-Kāyaśtha (like Sāmbapāla, Skandapāla, Bipra Pāla etc), Karana Kāyaśtha (like Naradatta, Kāyaśtha Prabhu Chandra, Rudra Das etc). Jyestha Kāyaśtha (like Nalasena and others) who used to perform the Secretarial and Clerical functions of the state. This class of officials in course of time emerged as a very influential caste of Bengal.

The term *Karana* was synonymous with the Kāyaśthas. The *Karāṇas* were royal officials who worked as clerical staff. Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that in the early period this class of officials probably used *Karṇis*, a kind of engraving instruments for the purpose of writing for which they were called *Karāṇas*.¹⁶ Both the sections viz. the Kāyaśthas and *Karāṇas* had formed a caste in later times. This view is supported by the *Ajayagāḍ* inscription of Bhojavarma, a king of the Chandella dynasty. The *Vishṇusmṛiti* and Yajñavalkya Smṛiti also support the view that in the early period the Kāyaśthas were royal officials. The *Vishṇusmṛiti* describes the Kāyaśthas as the writer of royal deeds and documents while the commentator of the *Yajñavalkyasmṛiti* describes them as writer and accountants.¹⁷

In the Gupta and Post Gupta periods the *Karāṇa-Kāyasthas* were mere an occupational class, not a particular caste. The *Sandhi-Vigrahadhika* Naradatta,^{17A} the writer of the *Gunāigarh inscriptions* addresses himself as *Karāṇa Kāyastha*, while Lokenātha of the *Tipperah copper Plate inscription*^{17B} addresses himself as a *Karāṇa*. From the descriptions of different writers, it is clear that there existed a close relation between these two classes of officials. Dr. N.R. Roy, considering the references in different copper plate inscriptions thinks that the term *Karāṇa* might indicate a profession but it has a tendency to form a separate caste (or *Varna*).¹⁸

The story of Lokenātha also indicates another important thing. His maternal grand-father Keśaba is described as a Pārśava, while his own grand-father was a *Dvijabara* (Brāhmana) who is

said to be a descendant of Bharadvāja, the great sage of ancient India. The story indicates that even in the post-Gupta period intercaste marriage was not uncommon in Bengal and it was looked down upon by the people of Bengal. Dr. N.R. Roy reasonably expresses his doubt if intercaste marriage had degraded the family of Lokenātha.

Ambashṭha Vaidya: The Ambashṭhas of ancient India are referred to in many works. The *Aiteraya Brāhmaṇa* mentions an Ambashṭha who had a minister named Nārada. The Greek and Roman writers refer to the Ambashṭhas who lived on the bank of the Chenab in the Southern Punjab. The Purāṇas describe them as *Anavasita Vrātya Kshatriyas* (degraded Kshatriyas). In the Jataka stories they are described as agriculturists, while Manu describes them as physicians. It is said that the tribe originated from the Union of Brāhmaṇa male and Vaiśya female.¹⁹

From these accounts it appears that they were a mixed caste. The *Bṛihad Dharma Purāṇa* says that the Brāhmaṇas gave them (the Ambashṭhas) almost a rebirth by performing their ceremony of purification; called them as 'Vaidya' and gave the 'Āyurveda' to them through Nāsatya and Dasra.²⁰ Since then they were allowed to perform the Vedic rites, to study the 'Āyurveda' and to follow the profession of the Vaiśyas in the manufacture and distribution of medicines.²¹

The Ambashṭha-Vaidyas might have formed the Vaidya community of Bengal in later times. The Ambashṭha community of ancient India had adopted different professions in different parts of Northern India. Even to-day a section of the Kāyastha community in Bihar is known as Ambashṭhas. The *Sūta Samhitā* describes the Ambashṭhas as identical with the Māhisyas.

Dr. R. C. Majumdar expresses his doubt about the existence of the Ambashṭhas in ancient Bengal. But Dr. N. R. Roy refers three inscriptions of a Pāṇḍya king of the 8th century A.D. in which the Vaidya Sāmantas are mentioned. One of these Vaidya Sāmantas was born in Vaṅgalandai. He was expert in music. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that Vaṅgalandai might be a synonymous term for Vaṅga or it might be a colony of the people of Vaṅga situated

in the Pāṇḍya kingdom. On this assumption, Dr. Roy thinks that the Vaidya *Upavarṇa* (sub-caste) had grown in Bengal by the 8th century A D²².

The Kaivarta-Māhisya; The Kaivartas were the native people of Bengal and their existence in the Pre-Pāla period cannot be denied by us, though a few references can be found in the early literatures.

The Kaivartas are referred to in the works of Manu (x-34). They are described as Mārgava or Dāśa, and originated from a Nishāda father and Āyogava mother. The *Vishṇupurāṇa* describes them as non-Brāhmanas, i.e. they were outside the pale of the Brāhmanical society and culture. The *Jātakas* describe them as Kāyasthas. According to *Brahama Vaivarta Purāṇa* the Kaivartas were mixed caste. They lived in different parts of Bengal.

Manu describes the Kaivartas as boatmen while the *Jātakas* refer to them as fishermen. The *Amarakosha* also describes them as *dāsa* and fishsrmen. They had been placed in the *Antaja* section of the Hindu society. They could not play any important part in the pre-Pāla period. The liberal attitude of the Pāla rulers gave them a unique opportunity to secure strength as well as importance in the Pāla period. Taking advantage of the weaknesses of the later Pāla rulers they rose in rebellion under the leadership of Divya on Divyoka and established their supremacy in Northern Bengal.

Antajas (untouchable) : Besides these principal castes, there existed a number of tribes or clans of Bengal like Medas, Andhras, Chandalas etc. They were regarded as *Antaja* (not touchable). Besides these clans we have also the names of some *Antaja* castes like Dombas, Śabarās and Kāpālikas. They are mentioned in the *Charyā Sangs*. These so called *Antaja* castes lived outside the pale of the Brāhmanical society. They had built up the culture of their own.

From the *Charyā* Songs we come to know that the Śabarās lived in the forest and hills and used to wear apparel made of the feathers of peacock. The Kāpālikas were primitive in nature and were almost naked. The Dombas lived in huts outside the villages

and towns and earned their livelihood by making baskets and looms made of bamboos. They were expert in music and dancing.²³

It is already noted that since the Gupta Age the social life of the people of Bengal had been reorganised according to the Brāhmanical ideals. But it did not follow the caste system of the Aryan society strictly. The Kshatriya and the Vaiśya community were absent in the social structure of Bengal. Though in the Gupta and the Post-Gupta periods names like Betravamnan and Chandravarman etc. can be found, the scholars like Dr. N. R. Roy are not sure if they belonged to the Kshatriya community. Even the rulers of Bengal did not claim themselves as Kshatriyas. The appearance of innumerable castes and sub-castes in later period made the social life of Bengal distinct from the social life of Northern India. Dr. R. C. Majumdar thinks that these castes and sub-castes originated mainly from the development of different arts, crafts and professions and partly from other factors. The tribal, racial and religious factors were also at work and gradually added to the number of castes.²⁴ The caste system which had been introduced in Bengal since the time of the Guptas received its final shape through process of evolution. The Sena rulers (of the 12th century A.D.) gave the final shape according to the instructions of the Smṛitikāras of that period.

Some scholars think that Bengal first came under the influence of Buddhism and then it was Brāhmaṇised. The systematic preachings of Brāhmaṇism had started in Bengal since the Gupta Age. The Buddhist Śramaṇas, inspite of their leadership in the field of education, could not convert the native tribes of Bengal into Buddhism, nor they could check the progress of Brāhmaṇism. On the other hand the Brāhmaṇas who lived in Bengal or came from outside in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods seem to have earned respect and admiration from the native people for their knowledge and way of livings. The patronage of the rulers of Gauḍa and Vaṅga (like Śaśāṅka) towards Brāhmaṇism also created a favourable field for the spread of Brāhmaṇism. For this reason Bengal experienced the progress of

the Brāhmanical faith in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods.

But the Brāhmanical school of Bengal, inspite of their liberal attitude at the initial stage, had to accept the instructions of the orthodox Smṛitikāras in their social life subsequently, which encouraged them to impose a series of religious and semi-religious rites (Saṁskāras) on the life of man, belonging to the Brāhmanical faith.

In this connection it can be said that the gradual decline of trade and commerce with other countries, dependance on land more and more and the ever increasing influences of feudalism might have made the social life rigid. The merchants and the people who were engaged in different trades had lost their former importance in the social life.

Since the post-Gupta period, conservative schools of the Hindu society assumed a bitter attitude not only against traders and labourer class but also against some of the native tribes of Bengal. Some of these tribes like Med, Bhil, Kole, etc were regarded as Antaja while others like Pukkusha, Kāsh, Śabar, Pulinda etc were regarded as Yavanas. The tribes like Byādha, Hāḍi, Dom, Bāḡti (Bagdi), Chaṇḍālas, Malla, Dolbāhi (Dulia or Dule) Bāruḍ (Bauri) etc were looked down upon by them. They had been placed at the lowest rank of the society.

The intercaste marriage upto the Pala period was not uncommon in Bengal. From the case of Lokenatha it can be presumed that the marriage between a groom of higher caste and a Śūdra bride was permissible. Though marriage of the same caste was preferred by the Smṛitikāras, there were some restrictions on the endogamous marriage. If any one violated the restrictions, he was to be regarded as a Śūdra or outcaste.

The strict rules and regulations were mainly applicable for the Brāhmaṇas. Though apparently their position had been elevated in the society, it made them separate from the other castes of the Hindu society.

Another interesting feature of the period is the growing ascendancy of the Karaṇa-Kāyasthas and Brāhmaṇas in the field of administration. Though in the Gupta period the merchants

had enjoyed some rights in the field of administration, the governors and high officials had to take their consent before the transfer of lands; they took active part in the field of administration. The position had been changed in the Post-Gupta period. From the end of the 7th century A.D. the decline of trade and commerce made their position weak. From that time the Karaṇa Kāyasthas were regarded as *Sat-Śūdra*. With the spread of Brāhmaṇism, the Brāhmaṇism of Bengal received the royal patronage and they were regarded as a very influential class.²⁵ They along with the Karaṇa-Kāyasthas began to take active part in the political field.

Institution of Slavery: Like other parts of India the institution of slavery might have been introduced in Bengal from the very early times. But we have not sufficient information which may throw light on this aspect of society for that period.

Probably, from the time of Aryanisation, the institution of Slavery had taken a definite shape. Kautilya, in his works prescribes the rules and regulations about the system of buying and selling slaves.²⁶ The nobility and the rich merchants who lived in prosperous towns, used to keep slaves. Vātsyāyana in his works gives a hint (v/6/38) about the slaves of Bengal.²⁷

From these works we come to know that the slaves were regarded as absolute property of a person and his successors inherited them from him. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that the institution of slavery had a close connection with the capitalistic society of ancient Bengal. In this connection it can be said that the position of some native tribes who were placed at the extremity of the growing Aryan society, was not better than that of the slaves. They were placed in most humiliating position and they were exploited by the upper castes of the Brahmanical society.

In later works like *Dāyabhāga* of Jimūtivāhana, the position of female slaves is discussed. It is laid down that if there is a single slave inherited by more than one, she must serve her owners during specific period in turn.

The position of Devadāsīs was not also better than slaves. They were dedicated to the famous temples of Hindu Gods;

whatever might have been the primary purpose or object, they served as the mistress of the priests and of the nobility. The practice of employing Devadāsīs was in vogue even in earlier periods and the work of Kalhaṇa refers to a famous Devadāsī of Puṇḍravardhana named Kamalā who had been employed in the temple of Kārtikeya. Kamalā was well versed in dance, music and fine arts.

In later times (in the Sena period) the Practice of keeping Devadāsīs in temples had become a fashion. They had been employed in large numbers and they were to entertain the ruling class and the priests of the temples.

References :

1. *H A B*, p. 413.
2. Vishnupurāṇa (IV), Matsya Purāṇa (p. 48), Manu X(p. 44),
3. R.P. Chanda, *Indo Aryan Races*, p. 43.
4. The Mahābhārata (Bengali edition published by Tulikalam Calcutta, p. 256).
5. *B I*, Vol. 1, p. 284.
- 5A. *Ibid* P. 284.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 28B.
7. *H A B*, p. 414.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 415.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 416.
10. Brīhad Dharma Purāṇa (edited in Bibliotheca series) III, 13; there is a list of thirty six (mixed) castes with a few additional ones. In *Brīhad Dharma Purāṇa*, III, 14; these thirty six castes are called Sudras and their professions have been described.
11. The scholars are not sure about the exact location of the place. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that the place was probably in the Rangpur district of modern Bangladesh, *B I*, Vol. I, p. 282.
12. *B I*, Vol. I, p. 283.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 285
14. P.L. Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 42.
15. D.C. Sarkar, *Society and Administration of Ancient India*, Vol.1 p. 13.
16. *B I*, Vol. I, p. 287.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- 17A. *C.B.I.* p. 69
- 17B. *B. I.* p. 288

18. *Ibid*, p. 288
19. *H A B*, p. 436.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
21. *Upapurana*, II, pp. 441-42.
22. *B I*, Vol. I, pp. 292-293
23. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
24. *H A B*, p. 415.
25. *B I*, p. 331.
26. Kautilya; *Arthasāstra* (Bengali translation by RG. Basak, Vol-I, Chapter XIII, pp. 283-87)
27. N.R. Roy, quoted the lines of Vātsyāyāna in his works, Vol. I, p. 358.

CHAPTER II

“EVERY DAY LIFE”

FOOD, DRINKS, DRESS, ORNAMENTS, STYLES, AMUSEMENTS ETC.

If we want to make ourselves familiar with the cultural life of the people of Bengal of the Pre-Pāla period, we should study their food and drinks, different customs and practices, games and sports, amusements etc carefully.

The literatures of ancient Bengal may have some accounts about the food and drinks, dress, ornaments, games and sports etc of ancient Bengal. For the Pre-Gupta period we can depend on the informations supplied by the Jain and Buddhist literatures of ancient India. We can also depend on the writings of the old Smṛitikāras and writers like Manu, Kauṭilya and Vātsyāyana.

For the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods we have to depend on the writings of dramatists like Kālidāsa and the accounts left by foreign writers like Fa-Hein, Hiuen-Tsang, I-Tsing, Seng Chi and others. The old inscriptions and the sculptures, the plates of Maya-nāmatī and Pāhaḍpur also throw valuable light on the subject. The *Apabhraṁśa* literature, the *Charyā* songs and the writers of the Pāla and Sena periods also help us to have an idea about the general habits and practices of the people.

(a) Food and drink: The people of Bengal of the Pre-Pāla period did not prefer the food prescribed by the old Smṛitikāras of the Aryan society. Even to-day the Bengalis like to prepare different types of food which are not prevalent in other parts of Northern India. They prefer mustard oil to ghee for the purpose of cooking food. From the ancient times Rice and fish are the two most favourite dishes for the common people of Bengal. But in other parts of Northern, Western (Gujarāt and Maharāstra) and Southern India a large section of Brāhmins do not touch fish. Here

the influences of the Austric and Dravidian races are more profound in respect of food and drinks than the influences of the Aryan society. Much before the advent of the Aryans, the native people had become familiar with the art of tilling land. Their chief tilling instrument was plough (*Lāṅgala*). The temperate climate and congenial natural conditions of the land were favourable for the growth and production of a rich variety of agricultural food and cash crops like paddy, barley, sugar cane, jute, cotton (*Kārpās*), various kinds of fruits and edible oils, vegetables, pulses, species etc.

From the very early time Bengal had earned much fame for the cultivation of paddy. Kālidāsa in his works *Raghuvamśa*, mentions the *Salidhana* (a special type of paddy) of Bengal.¹ He gives a description how—this *Salidhana* was protected by the cultivators of Bengal. Different types of paddy were grown in Bengal. Rice was the principal food of Bengal. Fish was also very favourite to them. The habit of eating fish by the people of Bengal were looked down upon by the Aryan society of Northern India, for which they put restrictions on the people belonging to their society to visit Bengal in the very early times. Even in the 6th century B.C. the people of Northern India did not appreciate the food habits of the people of Bengal. From the *Āchāraṅga Sūtra*, the Jaina text, we come to know that when Mahāvira visited Bengal, he suffered much for want of suitable food.

From the time of the Guptas, an attempt might have been made to introduce the food and drinks of the Aryan community for the upper sections of the people of Bengal, but it met little success. In later time the *Smṛitikārs* of Bengal (like Bhavadev Bhaṭṭa) were forced to give recognitions to the old food habits of the people of Bengal with some modifications and even allowed the Brāhmaṇas to eat fish and meat.² So it can be said that the principal food and drinks introduced by the Austric and Dravidian races had a great popularity, for which the Hindu society of Bengal had been forced to accept them in later times, though the upper castes did not accept all the food and drinks of the native tribes of Bengal.

From the different evidences (like the accounts of Hiuen Tsang) it can be presumed that besides rice, fish and meat, the people of Bengal liked to eat vegetables, fruits, milk and cakes (in various forms). Like to-day rice was the main food for the people of Bengal, It is already mentioned that the cultivation of rice had been introduced much before the advent of the Aryans in India. People of all categories, high and low preferred rice. The people felt a sadness when they found no vestige of rice in the cooking pot (*Hāḍite Bhāt nai, niti ābesi*).³ They did not generally favour any substitute food for rice (*bhāt*). (They preferred hot-boiled rice). From the works of *Prākṛita Piṅgala* and *Naishāda Charita* the two works of the late mediaval times, we come to know about the food habits of the people of Bengal. Both the works tell us that the people liked to eat hot boiled rice with some *ghee* (clarified butter). They liked to eat rice on the leaves of the plantain tree. They also preferred milk, small fish and vegetables on their dish (*Ogrābhatta rambhā a patta Gaika Ghitta dughdha Sājukta/mouli machha nālita gachha dijjai Kanta Khāi Punavasta*) These lines of the *Prākṛita Piṅgala* indicate that a married man having moderate pecuniary means seems to have considered himself fortunate enough in his every day household life if he could get a simple and hearty meal served by his wife.⁴ The poor people had little scope to change their menu from time to time. They were satisfied if the wife of the house could serve dishes regularly with the requisite quantity of warm boiled rice with some vegetables and fish with her own hands (Cr. *Dijjai Kanta Khāi Punavanta*).

The people were not much familiar with the cultivation of pulse (*dāl*) and therefore, it was not included in their menu. There were even few references to dal (pulse) in the list of food, prepared by the Bengali writers of the mediaeval period. It had been introduced in much later period.⁵

There is a long list of vegetables eaten by the people of Bengal. Among these vegetables the names of *Patol* (a kind of kitchen vegetables), *Bārtaku* or *begun* (briñjal), *mulāka* (Raphenus sativers), *Karāvellaka* (*Momordica Charantia*, popularly known in Bengali as *Karolā*), *Kārkotaka* (popularly known in Bengali as

Kākrole), *Gojihva* (elephantopus scaber), masaka (popularly known as barbati), *Tintri*, *alabu* (gourd) etc, can be mentioned here. They were very favourite (popular) vegetables to the people of Bengal⁶.

Besides these vegetables we have a list of pot herbs grown and used in ancient Bengal to prepare the soups and curries. These pot herbs were mustards, vetagna Kachu, Susnisaka (*Susni*) Kalambika (*Kalmi*) haridra nimba and hila-mochika (*helencha*). The people were probably familiar with the spices like pepper (*Marich* and *pippali*) *labanga*, *jiraka*, *elā* (cardamum), saffran, ginger, camphor, nutmeg, hingu and ajamoda (*rāndhunī*)⁷.

It is already noted that in spite of the restrictions of the *Smṛitikāras* of the Aryan society, a large section of people belonging to the Brāhmiṇ community could not resist temptation of eating fish and meat. It was due to this consumption of fish by the greater section of people that the *Smṛitikāras* of the mediaeval period (specially Sena period) like Bhavadev Bhaṭṭa, Śrinath Acharya, Jimutavāhana etc allowed the Hindu society to eat fish and meat except on some occasions. But the *Smṛitikāras* of Bengal put some restrictions on eating, those fishes which had ugly forms or heads like snakes and which lived in holes. The Brāhmiṇs were also prohibited to eat fish and meat on certain lunar days like *Ekādaśī*, *Amāvasyā* (Dark night of the new moon) and *Purnimā* (full moon night). From the works of the *Smṛitikāras* we find the names of their popular fishes such as rohita, māgura, sākula (saul) śringi (Singi) Śafara (pīnṭhi), mauli (maurāla) etc. Besides these fishes we also find the mention of crabs (*Kāṅkrā*) and timi (whale). Dr. Taponath Chakravarty thinks that gigantic fish like the whale were not probably used as food by the people of ancient Bengal.⁸

The general people liked to eat the flesh of goat, lamb, deer, pigeon and hare.⁹ The *Smṛitikāras* did not permit the upper castes to eat raw and dried meat. Besides the above mentioned animals, the people were allowed to eat the flesh of five nailed animals, the godhā, the porcupine and tortoise.^{9A} They were not allowed to eat the flesh of snails, fowls (both domestic and wild), cranes, ducks, camels, boars, cows etc. But the lower castes and the people

who lived outside the pale of Brāhmaṇism did not follow the rules of the Smārtas strictly.

The Brāhmaṇical society of Bengal had been instructed to avoid some vegetables like mushrooms, onions, garlicks etc.

Among other favourite food diet we can mention the names of *Pāyasa*, *maṇḍā* and sweetmeats made of products of milk *Chhāna*, *mākhan* and *Kṣhīra*. They were very popular to them.

We have a long list of popular fruits such as mango, Jack-fruits, cocoanut, vilva, badari, orange, piyarā, pomegranate, melon, cucumber, lemon, palmyra, Kapittha (Kayet bel), drakshā (grapes) āmalaka, plantain, jambu, pāniphāl, kharjura, udumbāra, kaseru etc. The juice of palmyra and sugercane was regarded as very delicious and these fruits were cultivated in large numbers. Betels were taken with betel-nuts, catechu and lime.

The *charyā* songs mention the use of tamarind in different items of food. Possibly the poor people used to eat rice soaked overnight with water with some tamarind.

Besides these, the early literatures mention the popularity of perched rice (chipitak or *chidā*), fried rice (Muḍi) and khai (fried grain). The people used to eat the perched rice (*chidā*) fried grain (khai) and some sweets in the full moon night in the month of Āsvin. These foods were also offered to Gods and Goddesses.

From the *charyā* songs we come to know about the existence of liquor shops in Bengal. The song described a liquor shop where Śaundika's (wine merchant) wife used to sell the liquor after fermenting it by means of the fine powder of the root of a tree.¹⁰ Probably intoxicating drink was generally made by distillation of rice, molasses, flour and honey. The reference to Madhuka (Bengali Mahua) and palmyra tree (Bengali Tāl) also indicate preparation of intoxicating drink from their juice. In spite of the bitter attitude of the priestly class against intoxicating drink, a large section of people were addicted to intoxicating drinks. In later times (in the Sena period) restrictions were imposed on drinks during the time of worship of Śhiva.

From the descriptions of the *Charyā* songs it appears that the habit of drinking wine was prevalent among the native tribes

(like Śabarās, Nishādas, Dombas etc). The *Charyā* songs, describe an interesting story where a drunk Śabara could not even identify his own wife, when he drew her, she gave her own identification. The Bauddha Siddhāchāryas did not regard drinking as an abominable thing. The worshippers of the Śakti cult and Tāntrikas of the Pāla and Sena periods did not hesitate to drink openly even in the time of worship.

To celebrate their social and religious festivals the native tribes used to drink intoxicating liquor as a part of their festival and even the nobility and the upper castes of the Hindu community assumed a liberal attitude during the festive days. They were familiar with drinking. From the *Charyā* songs it is known that there were specific signs of liquor shops. Sometimes the people used the cover of the wood-apple (bela) as their drinking cup.

Though the *Charyā* songs were written sometimes after the post-Gupta period, the time-gap was little and it can be presumed that the habits and practices of the people had not been changed thoroughly by this time. So, in order to get informations for the socio-religious habits and practices of the people of Bengal of the Pre-Pāla period we can depend on the descriptions of the *Charyā* songs.

From the descriptions of I-Tsing, the Chinese monk who visited Tāmralipta towards the end of the 7th century A.D. we can get some idea about the menu of the social feasts of Bengal, When he proposed to invite some priests for a dinner, he was told that "it was the old custom to prepare abundant food and people would smile if the food supplied be only just sufficient to satisfy the stomach".¹¹

Hiuen Tsang also, in his works, gives us some idea about the sumptuous feast of ancient Bengal which consisted of a large number of vegetables, fish curries, cooked meat of mutton and deer, sweet cakes and delicious drinks. The dinner was followed by chewing of betel leaves.¹²

But it is already noted that the common people did not expect such a rich dinner in their daily lives. They were satisfied

if they could eat boiled busked rice or fried tender leaves of mustard, some liquid card and some cheap sweets in their dinner¹³

Games, Sports and Pastimes: From the early literatures and from the sculpture of Pāhādpur and Mayanāmatī we can get some idea about the favourite games and sports of the people of ancient Bengal.

Like other parts of Northern India, hunting was a favourite sport to the nobility. Wild animals were abundant in the forests of Bengal, which encouraged the nobility to set out for hunting, the Śavaras, the Pulindas, the Nishādas were the professional hunters who earned their livelihood through hunting. In a plaque at Mayanāmatī we find a hunter was going back home placing a dead deer on his shoulder. Generally hunting of deer was a favourite game to the hunters. The *Charyā* songs also narrate the story of deer hunting.

Another favourite out door game was wrestling. The people also favoured acrobatics.¹⁴ Generally the people, belonging to lower community, had proficiency in acrobatics and other physical exercises. It gave much excitement to the audience. Swimming was a popular pastime for both men and women.¹⁵

Among the indoor games dice and chess were very popular. Dice had been introduced in India since the time of the Vedas, though the scholars are not sure when the chess came into use, *Charyā* songs mention the game and it must have been introduced before the Pāla period. Probably these two indoor games were very popular to the rich nobility who used to spend their leisure by playing these games. Possibly gambling was also a favourite pastime to the nobility. Some times people arranged the cock-fight and sheep-fight and enjoyed them very much. From the Kailand Inscriptions of Śrīdhara Rāta of the Rāta dynasty we come to know that the king had a good health owing to his engagement in horse race and elephant race. The nobility enjoyed these races very much.

The *Charyāpadas* and other contemporary literatures mention the popularity of music, both vocal and instrumental,

dancing and theatrical performances. The literatures also mention the playing of lyre (*Vīnā*) with thirty-two strings.^{15A}

The women of ancient Bengal had no scope to participate in the outdoor games. To the ladies, belonging to the nobility, gardening and swimming were favourite pastimes. Sometimes the women belonging to lower community, used to play some indoor games like *Bāgh-bandi*, *Dash Pañchis*, *Ghunti* etc. with the help of pebbles. These games might have had an Austric origin. They were played by the native tribes of South-East Asia and the tribes lived in the islands of the Pacific from the very ancient times¹⁶.

Like to-day singing and dancing were very popular among the people of ancient Bengal. Ladies, belonging to the upper castes, practised singing and dancing. It is said that Padmavati, wife of Jaydeva (of the Sena period) was a famous dancer who displayed dancing with the song of her husband (12th century A.D.). There are reasons to believe that the classical songs and dances of Northern India had been introduced in Bengal much before the Pāla period. Probably, the classical dance, music and drama began to receive the patronage of the nobility since the Gupta Age. From the *Rājātaraṅginī* we come to know about a dancer of Bengal named Kamalā who had got much proficiency in Singing and dancing. She was familiar with the *Bhārata Nāṭya Śāstra*. She used to display her songs and dances at the temple of Kārtikeya at Puṇḍravardhana. The fame of Kamalā had been spread out even to Kāshmir. The sculptures of Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmati represent the images of male and female dancers. These plaques indicate the popularity of music and dance in ancient Bengal.

Possibly, like other parts of Northern India, the practice of employing Devadāsī (the female dancers who were dedicated to the temple for entertaining the Gods of the temple) had been introduced in Bengal in the Gupta or Post-Gupta period. It has been first mentioned in the work of Kalhaṇa who mentions the name of Kamalā and her proficiency in dancing and music. The Devadāsīs were generally expert in different fine arts and Kalhaṇa throws light on the Deva-dāsīs of Bengal through Kamalā. In this

connection it may be noted that though these Devadasis were dedicated to the Gods of the temple, in their actual life they were to entertain the rulers, nobility and priests of the temple.

The folk-songs and dances were very popular to the common people. The *Charyā* songs, the plaques of Pāhāḍpur and Mayanāmatī throw some light on the life of the Folk-singers and dancers of Bengal. Since the Gupta Age the two parallel institutions, viz, the classical songs and dances of the Aryan society and the folk-songs and dances of the non-Aryan society had been developing side by side, While the nobility and the upper community had been patronising the cultivation of classical songs and dancing, the native tribes had been encouraging the folk-singers and dancers of the land. The appeal of the folk-songs and dances were greater than the classical songs and dances to the common people. Even the nobility sometimes could not neglect the appeal of the folk-songs.

From the plaques of Mayanāmatī and Pāhāḍpur it is found that both vocal and instrumental music were thoroughly practised by the folk singers of Bengal. The representation of the singers are seen carrying the musical instruments like drums, flute, lyre, Mridaṅga, Kaṅsar, Khole (Tamtam), pair of cymbals etc.¹⁷

From the *Charyā* songs we come to know that a section of the native people in ancient Bengal earned their liveli-hood through singing and dancing. The *Charyā* songs mention the *Dombins* and other women belonging to the so-called lower castes who were expert in singing and dancing. They were not bound to follow the normal laws of the Hindu society strictly. They very often made the male members of the upper community charmed. They used to wander from place to place for singing their songs. They, with the help of the shell of a gourd and strings, made a special type of lute and played it during the time of their songs and dance.

We do not have any clear idea about the dramas of the Pre-Pāla period. The Sanskrit drama might have been staged at the royal courts. From the *Charyā* songs we come to know that *Buddha Nātak* (the life of Buddha or particular event in the life of Buddha)

had been staged through dance and music. Probably, it had been introduced in Bengal, much before the Pāla period and the object of the drama was to present a particular event of the life of Buddha to the common people. But owing to the lack of information we can not say anything about the popularity of the Sanskrit plays in the royal courts and the life of the actors and actresses of the Pre-Pāla period.

Dress and Ornaments : From the literatures of ancient and mediaeval Bengal, the plaques of Pāhāḍpur and Mayanāmatī and also from the sculptures found in different parts of Bengal, we can have an idea about the dress, ornaments etc. of ancient Bengal.

The people, like other parts of Northern India, used to wear simple dress. They generally used to wear a single piece of cloth to cover the lower portion of the body (from naval to knee). The upper portion of the body remained open. Sometimes the rich section of people covered the upper portion by loose garments like *uttariya*.¹⁸

After Aryanisation, large number of people had accepted the Aryan culture. They began to wear the same dress and ornaments prevalent in Northern India. Probably the royal families, the nobility and the upper castes were imitating the dress and ornaments of the people of Northern India.

The men used to wear *dhoti* which was generally shorter than that of the present day. It hardly reached below the knee. Both the ends of the *dhoti* were drawn in and tucked up behind.¹⁹ To keep it tight knots were given just below the navel. The common people did not wear undergarments. It is already noted that the rich section and nobility sometimes used to wear upper garments. The women used to wear *sāḍis* (saris). The *sāḍis* were longer and reached upto ankle. The *dhoti* and *sāḍis* were made of cotton. From the earlier sculptures of Pāhāḍpur we find that the *sāḍis* went round the lower part of the body, one end falling vertically behind the left leg in graceful folds.²⁰ The *Sāḍis* did not cover the upper portion of the body and it generally remained exposed. Only the ladies belonging to nobility covered their upper portions through veils. They also used brassiers (*Stana-Pattas*).

Probably the ladies of Bengal belonging to higher castes of the town preferred the fashion of Northern India and used to cover their breasts by brassiers²¹. The rich section preferred the clothes embroidered with various delicate designs. The trees, leaves and flowers were painted on their cloths. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that the fashion of painting cloths had been introduced at first in Northern India and from there it had been spread out to other parts of India. He also thinks that the practice of keeping upper portion of the body uncovered by the women was an Austro-Polinesian practice. Even to-day, the native people of Bālidwip (in Indonesia) and some Islands of the Pacific maintain the tradition.²²

To perform religious rites, the women of the rich community used to wear the sādhis made of jute-silk (Paṭṭa-Vastras); the rich nobility used to wear special dresses during the time of social festival. From the plaques and literatures it appears that the female dancers used to wear long and tight trousers and covered their upper-portions with brassiers and a long veil. The Saṁnyāsis (monks), ordinary warriors and the poor people wore *lengtis* which covered only a small portion of the thigh.

The terracottas of Pāhādpur throw light on the dress of the common soldiers, gate-keepers of the royal houses, wrestlers and the labourer class. They generally used short trousers. The children used to wear either short dhoti or trousers. The soldiers, gate keepers etc. of the royal houses used to wear shoes which were made of leather. But the common people were not habituated to wear shoes. From the literature of the mediaeval period we come to know that the Brāhmaṇas and rich community sometimes used to wear shoes made of wood and deer-skins.

From the plaques of Pāhādpur and Mayanāmatī and also from the contemporary literatures we come to know about the use of umbrellas. It also appears that the gate-keepers, wrestlers etc. of the royal houses carried bamboo-sticks when they were engaged in their official duty.

Like to-day the women of ancient Bengal liked cosmetics

and perfumes. From the inscriptions of the Pāla period (the *Bhāgalpur inscription of Nārāyaṇ-pāla*) we come to know that the women liked flowers and they kept flowers on the braid of hair and with their long hair they made different styles^{22A}. Some men had a fascination to keep long hair. Married women put a mark of vermillion on their forehead, though it was of Austric origin. They painted their eyes with *Kājjal* (collyrium). The women of the rich community painted their body with liquid sandal dust and *jafran*, (Saffron). They also reddened their lower lips with vermillion and painted their feet with lac²³. They used perfumed oil and garlanded their braid of hair. But the use of perfumes and cosmetics were confined only among the ladies of high birth. The women living in the villages had no scope to use costly cosmetics and to spend a time for the decoration of the body. They were satisfied with simple dress. The Śavaras and Nishāda girls liked to keep the feathers of the peacock and flowers on their hair. The *Charyā* songs describe that the women decorated their body with flowers.²⁴ As in other parts of India, the women of ancient Bengal liked to wear ornaments, though the poor section had little scope to wear ornaments of precious metals like gold and silver.

The rich men and women used to wear necklaces, ear-rings, finger rings etc. the women used to wear girdle, bracelets, armlet, bangles, *nupurs* (tinkling ornaments worn round the ankles) etc.²⁵ Bharatmuni in his works mentions the use of gems by the women of Gauḍ at the end of their braid of hair²⁶. The ornaments were generally made of gold. Silver was not available in Bengal in large quantity in the post-Gupta period, though the ornaments made of silver was not unfamiliar to them. The ornaments made of bronze was also popular to them. The rich ladies used to wear ornaments made of valuable stones, sapphires, diamonds pearls etc. They also wore bangles made of conch-shells.

The poor women who lived in the villages had no scope to wear precious ornaments. They sometimes wore ear rings of green palm-leaf. They were also satisfied with garlands made of flowers.²⁷

There are some doubts if the women used to wear familiar nose-rings. The images found at Tamruk, Chandraketuḡaḡ and Pahāḡpur do not throw any light in this matter.

The colourful dress and fashions of the ladies of the town made the village people Charmed. A contemporary synonymous poet, praising the dresses and fashions of the ladies of the town says in his poem that they used to wear fine clothes, keep gold bangels on their arms, their hair was perfumed with oil and was tied skilfully. They kept flower-wreathes on their braid of hair and wore ear rings made of greenpalm leaf.²⁸

We know little of the furniture used by the people of Bengal. The *Charyāpadas* refer to the bedstead, mirror and lock with key.²⁹ The plaques of Pahāḡpur represent terracotta toys, bedstead, flower stands, caskets, and domestic utensils like bowls, vases and pitchers of different kinds.³⁰

From the literatures of the post-Gupta, Pālās and Sena periods we come to know that the dress and etiquette of the women of the town were different from that of the women of the village. The women who lived in the village, led a simple and honest life. They liked to wear simple dress. They had no scope to use cosmetics and their demands were very little. Chandra Chandra a poet of the late medieval period, says that the simple but charming dress of the village women make the movement of the pedestrian slow.³¹

The financial stringency and the little demands of the simple minded village women made them satisfied with their simple dress and ornaments, while the wealth of the nobility and merchants of the town encouraged the rich ladies of the town to wear gorgeous dress and ornaments. They liked to imitate the dress and ornaments of the ladies of Northern India.

The women of the villages were generally hardy and were engaged in domestic works. They also helped their husbands in their business and cultivation. They purchased the necessary articles from the markets.

Clothes : From the very early times Bengal was famous for her fine clothes. From the writings of the *Periplus* and *Arthaśastra*

we come to know that at time Bengal (Vaṅga) was famous for her fine clothes.

The weavers of Bengal produced different types of fine clothes and muslins. The muslins and fine clothes were exported to the Roman empire. Among the fine clothes the *Arthaśāstra* mentions *Kshaumavastra* and *Dukul*. Probably the *Kshaumavastra* was adorned with artistic designs and they were named according to their special designs. From the *Arthaśāstra* we come to know that three types of *Dukula*^{31A} had been produced in India, viz, *Vaṅgaka*, *Paunḍraka* and *Sauvarnakudyak*. *Vaṅgaka* was produced in Vaṅga. The cloth was very smooth and white. *Paunḍraka* was produced in Pundravardhana. The cloth was green in colour and glittered like pearl. The *Vaṅgaka* was made of cotton and was one of the best type of clothes of India.

The ordinary people had no means to buy the fine clothes like *Vaṅgaka* and *Paunḍraka*; they used clothes of cheaper quality. The literatures of the Pālā and Sena period tell us that the poor women of the villages covered their body with ragged clothes. The women of the poor Brāhmaṇa families were forced to spin threads for their own clothes. The women of Bengal were familiar with spinning.

Social Festival : The literatures of the Gupta and the post-Gupta period do not throw much light on the wedding ceremonies of ancient Bengal. From *The Naishāda Charita*, a late work of the mediaeval period, we come to know the story of wedding of Damayanti. It describes the dress and decorations of the ladies of Bengal. It also gives us some idea about the customs and practices observed during the time of marriage.

The Naishāda Charita: It describes the *Kulāchāras* (the customs observed by the women) and the decorations of the bride. It also describes that the musical instruments (viz. flutes, violin, Kartal (Tamtam) Mṛidanga were played by the musicians to celebrate the colourful function. Female dancers entertained the guests. Some of the special customs and practices, observed during the time of marriage, (like *Saptapadi*, *Kuślindikā* etc) are still in practice.

City Life: The towns and cities of ancient Bengal like Tāmralipta, Puṇḍravardhana, Nāvyaṅgaśikā etc. were much prosperous and the rich merchants and high officials of these towns lived in affluence of wealth. So they did not follow the normal rules strictly. Vātsyāyaṇa in his works mentions that the rich Youngmen of Gauḍadeśa used to visit the house of the female dancers and Bārāṅgaṇās (Prostitutes). They had illegal relations with them. The practice was not looked down upon by the urban society. They cared little for the restrictions imposed by the Smṛitikāras and religious leaders for normal upliftment. Vātsyāyaṇa in his works, Kāmasūtra, expresses his bitter attitude against the men and women living in the palaces of Gauḍa.³³ From his description we come to know that the ladies who lived in the palaces, sometimes committed adultery with the priests, court officials and the servants, serving at the palaces. From his remarks it is indicated that the people outside Bengal held a very low opinion about the nobility of Bengal.

The Smṛitikāras like Brihaspati Mishra in later times, condemns the Brāhmaṇas of Bengal mainly for two reasons: i) they ate fish and (ii) they were corrupted. Dhoyee in his works, *Pavanadūta* (v-42) mentions the sexual pleasures of the nobility and praises the female attendants of the royal court of Bengal for their beauty. Kshemendra, a poet of Kāshmir of the 10th and 11th century A.D. criticises the students of Gauḍa who went there for the purpose of education for their bad temper and corruptions.

It is already mentioned that the system of employing Devadāsīs was in vogue. Besides this, the rich people had employed female slaves in their houses. From *Dāya Bhāga* we come to know that they were kept for enjoyment. But here it should be remembered that the practice was not only prevalent in Bengal, it was also prevalent in other parts of India from the very early times, for which Kauṭīlaya prescribes the rules of employing female attendants³⁵.

The nobility (consisting of the royal family and high officials) the rich merchants had set up their supremacy in the socio-cultural life of the towns. From the *Dāmodarpur grants*, we

come to know that the rulers had given importance on the views of the *Nagara Śresthins* (the most wealthy merchant of the town), the *Sārthavāhas* (the chief merchant), the *Pratama Kulika* (the chief artisan), the *Pratama Kāyāsthās* etc when they granted lands to the applicants³⁶. Probably the common people and the artisan class lived a simple life and they were generally free from the vices and corruptions of the nobility.

From the descriptions of Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-Tsing and others, it appears that inspite of their vices the nobility and the rich merchants were the patrons of art and culture. Most of the cities of ancient Bengal (like Tāmralipta, Puṇḍravardhan, Koṭivarsha etc.) had become the centres of learning. The Buddhist *Vihāras*. and other educational institutions had been set up in these cities. These institutions received the patronage of the nobility and the merchant class. Without their help, they could not flourish or survive for a long time. (From the writings of Hiuen Tsang we come to know that all the expenses of the Nalanda *Mahāvihāra* were borne by Harshavardhana and some rich merchants of the country). The merchants of Bengal maintained a cultural link with the other important cities of India and some other countries of Asia and Europe in the Gupta and post Gupta period which enriched the culture of Bengal³⁷.

Country Life: While the nobility and wealthy section of the town had been living in luxury and much grandeur, the people of the villages lived a simple life. They did not like the luxury and intemperate life of the rich people of the towns. They put much emphasis on the chastity of life³⁸.

The Brāhmaṇas of the villages were generally acquainted with simple and pure life and did not like corruptions of the city life. The contemporary *Smṛiti*. texts highly praise the Brāhmaṇas who were well versed in the Vedas and tried to follow the ideals of the Purāṇic Hinduism. They denounced all kinds of vices and sensualities. Drinking of wine was looked down upon by them. They assumed a strict attitude against adultery and theft. They propagated the ideals described in the *Upanishadas* and the *Rāmāyana-Māhābhārata* society³⁹.

In this connection it can be said that Jainism and Buddhism had been preached in Bengal in a very early time. It is said that both Buddha and Mahāvīra visited different parts of Bengal. Both the religions had a strong base in ancient Bengal. If the Brāhmins of Bengal had failed to set up any ideal, the prospect of Brāhmaṇism might not have been bright here. Though Vātsyana blames the Brāhmins, serving in the royal palaces, for their adultery, most of the Brāhmins who lived in the villages, at least in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, observed the rules of the Purāṇic Hinduism strictly. Their source of income was also limited and it also forced them to maintain a simple and pious life.

From the old inscriptions and literatures of Bengal it appears that the people of ancient Bengal (specially the rural people) were satisfied with the ideal of plain living and high thinking. They had no hankering after wealth. The poor people had to face starvation from time to time (*Hāḍite bhātnāi nity upabās*)⁴⁰. The village women regarded themselves fortunate if they could serve their husbands and other members of the family the dishes full of rice, vegetables and small *maurala* fish⁴¹. The demand of the people was not very high. The poor people of some villages got some relief from their dull and monotonous life when the religious and social functions took place in the house of their rich neighbours. These socio-religious festivals gave them some relaxations from their dull life.

From the *Charyā Songs* we can get a picture about the domestic life of the people of Bengal. From the songs of *Kukkuripāda*, *Kānhupāda* and *Saharpāda*. we learn that the people were afraid of thieves. The people were not free from corruptions and adultery⁴³. The system of dowry was prevalent in ancient Bengal⁴⁴. The *Charyā* songs also indicate that probably the people of Western and Northern India did not like to set up matrimonial relation with the people of Bengal. *Sarahapāda* in his songs (conto 39, *Rāg Malshi*) says ‘*Bange Jaya Nilashi para Bhanget Tohar Binana*’ (for his marriage with a women of Bengal he has lost his sense). *Bhusukpāda*, in a song describes his marriage with *Chañḍāla*

woman⁴⁵. He says that by his marriage with the Chaṇḍāla woman he has become a pure Bengalee. This song indicates that the intercaste marriage was not uncommon among the people of Bengal.

b) *The life of the Śavaras Nishadās, Domba and others* (or the life of the untouchable sections) :

After the advent of the Aryan people in Bengal, the land had to observe a change in the socio-religious life. The predominance of Brāhmaṇism since the Gupta Age had pushed out a large number of native people from the newly established society. The native tribes like the Nishādas, Dombas, Śavaras etc. lived outside the pale of Brāhmaṇism. They were regarded as lower castes. The Brāhmaṇas and the other high castes did not touch them. These sections had to build up a society of their own. They were guided by their own law and traditions and they did not follow the moral rules and the regulations of the Brāhmaṇical society in their daily life.

The *Charyā Songs* throw light on the life of the Savaras. They lived on the top of the hills far away from the locality. From the songs of Sāvarapāda, we come to know that the Śavaras lived on the high hills and the Śavara women liked to wear the garlands made of Guñja flowers. They kept the feathers of the peacock on the girdles ("Ucha, Ucha pabat tauhi basai Savari bāli (girl), Morangi pichha, parhin Savari gibat Gunjari māli"⁴⁶). They used to wear ear-rings. Sometimes the drunken Śavara could not even identify his own wife. His wife was to bring him back to their hut. The Śavaras lived in huts and lay in cots. Hunting was the main profession of the Śavaras, though cultivation of land was not un-known to them. They protected their paddy fields by erecting fence.

The native tribes, viz. the Nishādas, dombas etc. lived outside the village. Like the Śavaras, the Nishādas preferred hunting. The Dombas and Nishādas earned their livelihood by making weaver's loom, baskets and other necessary articles made of bamboos for household purposes. Even to-day a large number of Dombas have not given up their ancestral profession. They

earn their livelihood by making baskets and articles made of bamboos. They preferred to use boats to go from one place to another.

c) The plaques of Pāhāḍpur and Mayanāmatī also throw light on the life of the villagers engaged in different professions. Among them we can mention the names of fishermen, the goldsmiths, carpenters, weavers, iron-smiths, hunters, Snake-Charmers etc. These people served the society through their professions and supplied the needed articles. From the descriptions of the foreign writers (like Hiuen Tsang) we come to know that the common people of the villages were polite and gentle in nature and they were eager to live in peace.

d) *Position of Women*: Our sources of information about the position of women in social life of ancient Bengal are not sufficient. Though we can get some idea from the writings of Vātsyāyaṇa, Kālidāsa, Kalhaṇa and others, they cannot give sufficient information. To have a clear idea about the position of women in society we should have to take the help of the literatures of the Pāla and Sena periods. Though they are written in later times, they, to some extent help us to have an idea about the position of the women of the Pre-Pāla period.

Vātsyāyaṇa in his works criticises the ladies who lived at the palaces of Gauḍa for their corruptions⁴⁷, though he did not have any malice against all the women of Gauḍa deśa. He praises them for their gentle voice, devotions and beautiful structures⁴⁸. It is already noted that Kalhaṇa, in his works, mentions the life of a famous Devadāsī of Pauṇḍra named Kamalā, who had earned much fame for her proficiency in music and dancing.

Kālidāsa in his works *Raghuvamśa* describes the village women of Bengal who looked after the paddy fields along with their husbands. From the plaques of Maynāmati and Pāhāḍpur and also from the *Charyā Songs* we can get more information about them. From these plaques and *Charyā Songs* it appears that the women of the lower community helped their husbands in different respects. They conducted business of their husbands.⁴⁹ They also helped their husbands in the field of agriculture. They

used to go to markets to purchase their necessary articles. They also helped their husbands to earn money by means of spinning, weaving and some other mechanical art. They enjoyed more freedom than that enjoyed by the wives of the nobility.

From the writings of *Pavandūta* it appears that the women, belonging to upper castes, were educated and could write letters to their dear and near ones. The literatures of the Pāla and Sena periods praise the women of the Hindu community for their Chastity. The Pāla inscriptions compare Déddādevī, wife of Gopala, with different Goddesses of Hinduism like Rohinī (the wife of Chandra), Swāhā (wife of Agni), Śarvāṇī (wife of Śhiva) and Lakshmī (wife of Vishṇu). The women were tolerant in nature and tried their best to serve their husbands and other members of the family. They tried to follow the ideals of the women of the epic age (viz, the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*).⁵⁰

The women used to observe religious rites and *Vratas* with much devotion. Sometimes they donated lands for *Vihāras* and temples. The Pāhāḍpur Plate of 159 GE records the gift of land by a Brāhmaṇa couple for the maintenance of the arhats at vāt Gohāli Vihāra.^{50A}

The poor women sometimes served at the houses of the richmen. They served as foster-mother. Sometimes the poor women earned their livelihood by spinning threads or weaving clothes.

From the images found at Tamluk, Chandra-Ketugaḍ, Maynāmatī, Pāhāḍpur and other places of Bengal we can guess that the women like to-day loved to decorate themselves with dress and ornaments. They liked to put flowers on their heads and wore different types of ornaments. The poor women liked to wear ear-rings made of green palm-leaf.

They were expert in cooking. To make the soups and curries more tasteful the house-wives used different kinds of spices. They were able to prepare different types of cakes, porridge, curd and milk products.

The intercaste marriages and courtship were not uncommon in Bengal. Keshava was the grand-father of Lokenātha

of the Nātha dynasty. The father of Keśhava married a Śhudra girl (they lived in the 7th century A.D.) for which Keśhava was described as Pārśahava. But for his birth Keśhava and his descendants did not feel any humiliation from the society. Sometimes the wives of the nobility felt jealousy for the co-wives. Generally the wives of the nobility maintained the *puṛdāh* system. They were not allowed to walk publicly and speak with outsiders. They followed the etiquette of Northern India. Their ideal was to be a loyal wife and mother of virtuous son. Their freedom had been restricted.

Child marriage had been introduced in the Brāhmaṇical society. Possibly the custom of burning of widow on the funeral pyre of her dead-husband had been introduced in the Brāhmaṇical society of Bengal since the Gupta Age,⁵¹ though it was not compulsory to all. The life of the widows were miserable. They were to follow a number of restrictions imposed on them by the Smṛitikārās. They did not eat any exciting food and they were not allowed to join in social festivals like marriage. Though, in later times Jimūtivāhana had given them some rights on the property of their husbands, we do not know how far they were able to enjoy their rights in the Pre-Pāla period. They lived under the instruction of the male society.

It is already noted that the strict rules were applicable for the women of the high castes. The women of the lower castes and the native tribes like Śavaras, Chaṇḍālas, Dombas etc. did not follow the rules of the Hindu society. They enjoyed more freedom. They did not give much importance to the so called Chastity of women. Widow marriage was not very uncommon among the lower castes of the Hindu society.

Conveynances: The people of ancient Bengal used to travel from one place to another by bullock-cart, horse, elephants and boats. The Greek writers who visited India during the time of invasion of Alexander mention that the king of Prasioi and Gangaridai maintained a number of chariots pulled by four horses.⁵³ The grant of Dharmāditya mentions the use of bullock-cart.⁵⁴ *The Charyā songs* narrate the use of bullock-cart for bridal

procession. The rich and the aristocrat section could use horses, carriages and elephants as their conveyances. An image of decorated horse is seen in the plaques of Pāhāḍpur. The *Idilpur inscriptions* of Keśava Sena (of the Sena period) mentions a costly palanquin whose handles were made of ivory. Possibly the use of palanquin by the rich section had been introduced in Bengal much before the accession of the Sena rulers. The use of camels as means of conveyance was not uncommon to the people. In the Pāhāḍpur sculptures we find a camel is carrying an image of Goddess.⁵⁵

Besides these conveyances we must have to mention different types of boats, which were the principal means of transport and communication. The numerous rivers and canals of Bengal gave the people an opportunity to use the water routes. Their trade and commerce were carried on through the water-routes. The boatmen of Bengal had secured proficiency in the art of navigation. The people were familiar with country boats like *Diñgi*, *Dañgal*, *Bhelā* etc. which were used as ferry-boats. The *Charyā songs* refer to a number of boats including sea-going vessels.⁵⁶

The frequent use of the terms *Naubāt*, *Naubitān* (fleet of boats) *Nabat-Ksheni* (ship-building harbours) *Nau Dandak*, (the harbour where ships could take shelter) etc. also indicate about the development of the ship-building industry in Bengal and the acquaintance of the people of Bengal with the art of navigation.

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2. Bhavadeb Bhaṭṭa: *Brihaḍ Dharma Purāna* (an works of the 12th century A.D. "All these prohibition is meant for the prohibited day like Chaturdasi etc ... so it is understood that there is no fault (dosha) in eating fish and meat, pp. 67-68.
3. Quoted from the works of Dr. N. R. Roy, Vol. II, p. 564.
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5. *B I*, Vol-II, p. 570.
6. Chakravorty Toponath: *Food and Drinks in Ancient Bengal*, pp. 28-29.

7. Ibid. pp. 29-30.
8. Ibid., p. 41.
9. M. M. Sastri Haraprasad: *Bauddha Gan O Doha* (in Bengali), p.12,
- 9A. *Manusamhitā*; (ed. by Panchanan Tarkaratna) p. 132.
10. *Bauddha Gan-O-Doha*, XXX, 6, Dr. Śaahidulah thinks that the wine was fermented by a thin bark.
11. *HAB*, p.460
12. Hiuen Tsang, p.149
13. *HAB*, p. 459.
14. *Pāhārpur* Pl. XXVIII(b), XLII (e).
15. Dhoyee - Pavanduta, VV pp. 33, 38.
- 15A. *Charyapad*, (canto, 57, p. 54).
16. *B. I*, vol. II, p. 572
17. *Ibid.*, p. 573 .
18. *Ibid.*, p. 582.
19. *H A B*, pp. 450-61,
20. *Ibid.*, p. 461 .
21. *B. I*. Vol. II, p. 583.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 583.
- 22A. *C B I*, p. 173.
23. Chakravorty Taponath (op.cit., p. 48, 14-15)
24. *Charyāpada* (edited by Prof. Ghose and Prof. Mukherjee canto 28, Rag. Baladdi-Savarapada, p. 68).
25. *H A B*, p. 462.
26. *Bhāratmuni* (about 3rd century A.D.) in his *Nātyasāstra* mentions Gandenamalak Pnyaang Sashika Pasha Benikam. quoted from *B I*, p, 589
27. *B.I*. Vol., II, p. 588.
28. Quoted from the works of N. R. Roy, Vol. II, p. 585.
29. *Bauddha Gān O Doha* (in Bengal) edited by M.M. Haraprasad Sāstri, p. 30.
30. *Pahādpur Plaques*, LX, LXI, LXIV, Bhatta-Cal, pp. XXXV-XXXVI.
31. Quoted from-the works of N.R, Roy Vol., II, p. 586.
- 31A. Kautilya: *Arthasāstra*, (Beng. edition by Dr. R. G. Basak Vol. I, p. 117).
33. *Vātsyāyana : Kāmasūtra* (Beng. edition by Sudhanshu Ranjan Ghose Ch. VI, Autapurka Bhatta Canto-12, p. 175.)
35. Kautilya - *Arthasāstra*, Vol. I, pp. 117-18.
36. *Epigraphic India*, XV, 128, Basak R.G. : *History of North Eastern India*, p. 69.
37. Roy Nihar Ranjan : *Bāngleer Itihās* (Abridged¹ edition Pub : by Lekhak Samabay Samity, Calcutta, p. 439.
38. *B I*, Vol. II, p. 552.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 592.
40. *Charyā Songs*, canto-33, *Dentanpada*, p. 77.
41. The line of Prakrit Pingala is quoted from the works of Topanath Chakravorty (*Food and Drinks of Bengal*), pp. 14-51.

42. The Charya Song, Kukkuripāda, Rag Garba, Canto-2, p. 30 (edited by Ghose and Mukherjee).
43. Ibid., (canto-10 Kānhupada), pp. 41-42, Canto-18, Rag Rauda, p.56.
44. Ibid., (canto-19, Kānhupada, Rag Bhairabi), p. 57.
45. Ibid., (Bhusukpada, canto-49, Rāg Mallari, p. 104.
46. Ibid., (Savarapaba, Canto-28, Rag Baladdi), p. 68.
47. Vātsyāyan *Kamasutra* (Ch. Autapurkikā britte, canto Xn, p.175; Beng. trans by Sudhanshu R. Ghose, Mausami Prakashan, Calcutta)
48. Ibid., (Ch. *Daiśhik Upacharnirnaya*, canto-33, pp. 216-17).
49. The *Charyā songs* (cants, 3, p. 32 edited by Prof. Ghose and Mukherjee).
50. *B I*, Vol. II, p. 599.
- 50A. *C B I*, pp. 54-55.
51. *H A B*, p. 457.
52. *B J*, Vol. II, p. 601.
53. Quoted from *Bānglar Itihas*, Vol. II, p. 578.
54. Cf. Go-rathya in the Second grant of *Dharmāditya* (ins. No, A-21)
55. Pāhādpur Pl. LIII(b) A.S.I 1930-34, Pt. II, P. 256, PL c XXVII
56. The *Charyā songs* (Dombipāda, canto-14, Dhansi Rag, pp. 48-49, edited by Prof. Ghose and Mukherjee).

CHAPTER III

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF ANCIENT BENGAL

A) Spread of Aryanism

While the Aryans in North Western India had been engaged in composing the hymns of the *Vedas* and *Upanishadas*, the people of Bengal continued to follow the beliefs, customs and practices of the Proto-Austroloids, Dravidians and other Non-Aryan tribes. For a long time Bengal was pre-Aryan in socio-religious outlook and maintained her own religious philosophy and culture. The cult of the dead, magic incarnations, worship of fertility power in the form of mother Goddess, veneration for totems, worship of trees, rivers and fields dominated the minds of the native people for a long time. Even today a large section of the Bengalis (especially the illiterate section and elderly women) are not free from the influences of these powers. Though most of these customs and practices of the Bengal community had a non-Aryan origin, they are accepted by the Bengalee Hindus as a part of their religion.

The Aryan civilisation had established its supremacy in Bengal after a hard struggle with the native tribes. The customs and practices of the people of ancient Bengal were looked down upon by the Aryans. They put restrictions on their kinsmen to visit the country.¹ But in spite of their restrictions they could not stop their kinsmen to visit the land. The sannyasis (monks), merchants, religious preachers etc. began to visit Bengal for their own interest. The infiltration of the Vedic religions had been started much before the invasion of the Maurya emperors.

When the Vedantic religions (viz. Jainism, Buddhism, Ājivākism, Brāhmaṇism, etc.) had established their supremacy over the soils of Bengal, the orthodox Aryan and Non-Aryan

schools, at first, might have tried to maintain their separate identity, but their attempts did not succeed in the long run. Gradually the beliefs, rituals, ceremonies and duties of the Pre-Aryan folk had their impact on the Aryan culture (as well as religions) and a religious synthesis had taken place in Bengal.

So we are not surprised to see the observance of the rituals and practices like Navāṇṇa, Pauspārvaṇa, Holi, Charak, Gājaṇ etc. in the Hindu society of Bengal. The Hindus of Bengal have accepted a large number of Gods and Goddesses of the Non-Aryan tribes. They do not hesitate to worship the Gods and Goddesses like DharmaThākura, Manasā, Pañchānanda, Śitalā, Sasṭhī, Chaṇḍī etc., which are of Non-Aryan origin, with much devotion. But, on the other hand, the exotic Homa and other rituals of the Vedic origin were observed only by the Brāhmaṇas, Vaidyas and other high castes like Kayāsthas.

A noticeable feature in the religious history of ancient Bengal is that Brāhmaṇism had to wait here till the reign of the Guptas to place itself on a solid foundation, though from the very early times Saṇnyāsis and preachers visited the land for the purpose of preaching the ideals of Brāhmaṇism. A section of scholars say that Bengal was first śramaṇised and then Brāhmaṇised. We are not sure how far the views of these scholars are true. But it cannot be denied that Buddhism had a strong base in ancient Bengal and it maintained its predominance even during the reign of the first three powerful Pāla rulers.

Buddhism: It is said that lord Buddha had visited different parts of Bengal to preach his doctrine. Hiuen-Tsang refers to the tradition that Lord Buddha had travelled Puṇḍravardhana, Samataṭa, Karṇasuvarṇa for the purpose of preaching Buddhism. A number of Buddhist texts like *Sāmyutta Nikāya* and *Bodhisattvavadāna* refer to the tradition, though scholars like D. C. Sarkar think that the story of visiting the land by Buddha might have been baseless, it was created by the followers of Buddha in later times.²

But it can be presumed that Buddhism must have been established in Bengal at the time of Aśoka. A vast part of Bengal

(like Puṇḍravardhana and western Bengal) had been annexed to his empire and Aśoka must have sent Buddhist missionaries to preach Buddhism. It is also said that he himself went to Tāmralipta to send a Bodhi plant to Śrīlankā at the time when Śrīlankā was ruled by the pious king Devānāṃpiya Tissa.³

The missionary activities of Aśoka seemed to have inspired a large number of the people of Bengal to accept Buddhism. From the Sānchi inscription we come to know that a lady named Dharmadattā and a man named Risinandana, both residents of Puṇḍra-vardhana, donated money for erecting the gate, way and railings of the Sānchī Stūpa. The donation also revealed the close relation between the Buddhists of Bengal and the Buddhists of other parts of Northern India. The Tibetan tradition says that Nāgārjuna had built some Vihāras in Bengal and Puṇḍravardhana countries.⁴ The *Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscription* which may be dated in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. gives a long list of countries which had been converted by the fraternities (of monks of Tambapamna) and it mentions the name of Vaṅga along with Kāśhmīr and Gāndhāra. These evidences clearly indicate that from the very early time, Buddhism had a firm footing in Bengal and it might have received the royal favour and patronage.

Fa-Hien, the famous Chinese pilgrim, who visited India in the beginning of the 6th century A.D. came to Tāmralipta at the end of his journey. He noticed Buddhism to be in a flourishing condition in the sea-port town where there were twenty two monasteries with a number of resident-monks.⁵ Fa-Hien lived at Tāmralipta to copy the sacred Buddhist texts and to draw the paintings preserved in the monasteries. He found the supremacy of the Mahāyāna school in Bengal. Probably the supremacy of the Mahāyāna school had been extended so far as Tripurā and it continued for a long time.

The *gunāiḡhar grant* of Vainyagupta^{5A} (A.13) dated 507-B refers to the Buddhist Avaivarttika Saṅgha of the Mahāyāna sect Āsramavihara, which had been dedicated to Ārya Avalokiteśvara. It also mentions the two other Buddhist Vihāras of the locality.

The establishment of the Buddhist Viharas at Tippera (modern Bangladesh) shows that Buddhism had been firmly established even in the remote frontier of Bengal even before the 6th century A.D.

It is already mentioned that the Mahāyāna school had established its supremacy in Bengal. The liberal policy and generous ideals of Buddhist monks captured the minds of the people.^{5B} Mahāyāna literatures say that among the old sixteen Mahāsthaviras, one of the Mahāsthaviras (named Kulika) was a Bengalee by birth. He lived at Tāmralipta. Probably he appeared in the Pre-Gupta period.⁶ So it also appears that the Mahāyāna school had a firm footing in Bengal in Pre-Gupta period.

When Hiuen Tsang came to India in the 7th century A.D., he also found Buddhism in a flourishing condition in Kajaṅgala, Karnaśuvāna and Tāmralipta, though the number of Buddhist monasteries were reduced to ten at Tāmralipta.^{6A} He mentions the existence of the Sthavira school^{6B} in Bengal. From his writings we come to know that at least thirty monasteries of the Sthavira school had existed in Bengal. Hiuen Tsang says that there were more than 10 Buddhist monasteries in Karnaśuvāna and above two thousand brethren belonging to the Sāmmaṭiṃya (or Samataṭiṃya) school resided there. Besides Karnaśuvāna, Samataṭa was a centre of Buddhist missionary activities. About 30 Saṅghārāma existed there and about 2000 brethren lived in these Saṅgharamas.⁸ Hiuen Tsang also says that besides Buddhism and Jainism, a large number of followers of Brāhmaṇism lived side by side peacefully in Bengal.^{8A}

After Hiuen Tsang, I Tsing and Seng-chi, the two famous Chinese pilgrims came to India. Seng-chi came to visit India in the second half of the 7th century A.D. He has left a valuable account about the conditions of Buddhism in Samataṭa. He mentions a king named Rājabhāṭa of the Khaḍga dynasty who was a great worshipper of Buddhism. Seng-chi praises^{8B} the sincerity and devotions of Rājabhāṭa towards Buddhism. He used to make everyday hundred thousand statues of Buddha with earth and read hundred thousand śloka of the

Mahāprajñāpāramitā sutra. The Chinese traveller received a very cordial welcome from the king.

The gradual progress of the Brāhmaṇical faith and the growing popularity of the Tāntrika school had weakened the hold of Buddhism in Bengal in the first half of the 8th century A.D. The alleged anti-Buddhist attitude of Śaśānka might have strengthened the base of Brāhmaṇism in Bengal from the beginning of the 7th century A.D., though he could not check the missionary activities of the Buddhists of Bengal totally.

Sometime after the death of Śaśānka, Bengal had to face a great anarchy i.e. the Mātsyanyāya. This political as well as social confusion presumably produced unfavourable effect on the progress of Buddhism. The gradual decadence of the trade and commerce with the fall of Tāmralipta might have affected the base of Buddhism. It deprived them of the patronage of the rich merchants of Bengal. The activities of the Buddhist monks during this period is not known to us. But it appears that they could not tackle the situation with much prudence. From the writings of Tārānatha, the Tibetan scholar, we come to know that when Gopāla was elected for the throne of Bengal, Buddhism was in a state of decadence while Brāhmaṇism had a strong foothold in the religious life of Bengal⁹.

The patronage of the Pāla rulers towards Buddhism gave it a new life in eastern India. It had extended the life of Buddhism in eastern India, viz. Vaṅga, Gauḍa and Magadha for four to five hundred years¹⁰.

It is already noted that the Mahāyāna school had flourished in Bengal even before the Gupta Age. The acceptance of the Tāntrik ideology by a section of the Buddhist monks of Bengal led the rise of Vajrayāna school in Bengal.

Professor Benaytosh Bhattacharya in his article, "The Home of the Tantric Buddhism" comments that the Vaṅga-Samataṭa regions seems in all probability to have been the original home of the Tāntrick Buddhism. Many paintings, images, monasteries of the Vajrayāna school have been found in Bengal¹¹. Professor

N. K. Bhattasali in his "catalogue of sculptures in the Dacca Museum", thinks that some of the villages of the Vaṅga-Samatata region had a close connection with the Vajrayana school. Names of places like Vajroyoginī (in the Dacca district of Bangladesh) seem to be reminiscent of the Vajrayāna school. Besides the Vajrayāna school, we have the name of the Sahajīyā school in the early *Charyāpada songs*¹². These schools had flourished in the Pāla period, and we have here little scope to discuss about these schools in details.

Jainism: Like Buddhism, jainism and Ājivikism had got foothold in Bengal much earlier than Brāhmaṇism. Like Buddhism, Jainism and Ājivikism do not have any faith in the fallibility of the Vedas and the caste system of the Brāhmaṇya school, though Jainism has to recognise the consequence of one's actions and the doctrine of transmigration of souls of the *Upaniśads*.

Probably, the first Vedānta-based religion preached in Bengal was Jainism. The last two Jaina Tirthāṅkaras, viz, Pārśvanāthā and Mahāvīra were associated with champā and Paresnāth hill. These places were not far away from Bengal, for which Jainism had an easy access to Bengal. From the Jain text, the *Āchāraṅgasūtra* we come to know that Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, the last and greatest Tirthāṅkara of Jainism had made an extensive tour through the border districts of North-Rāḍhā for the purpose of preaching Jainism¹³. It is now agreed by scholars that the name of the district of Bardhamāna, (Eng. Burdwan) was derived from the name of Vardhamāna Mahāvīra. Though Mahāvīra and his followers at first received some ill-treatment from a section of people¹⁴, Jainism gradually established its influence in Bengal.

Several centres of Jainism had been set up in Bengal by Jainmonks. From *Sumāgadha story* in the "*Bodhi Sattvāvadāna Kalpa-lata*" we come to know that Puṇḍravardhana was a centre of Jainism at the time of Buddha. The '*Vrihat Kathā Kośa*' of Harisena, a Jain text, narrates the story how Bhadrabāhu, a son of a Brāhmaṇa of Devikota in Puṇḍravardhana became a Jain

saint and how he became the preceptor of Chandragupta Maurya, the great founder of the Maurya dynasty¹⁵.

There is a story in the Divyāvadhaṇa (XXVII) that a great killing of 18,000 Ajivik or Nirgranthas in Puṇḍravardhana took place in the third century A.C. during the reign of Aśoka¹⁶. At that time there had been no separate existence of the Ājivika sect. in the eyes of the Buddhists. Therefore, it can be presumed that the people killed at that time belonged to Jaina school.

The mention of the names of places like Aṅga, Vaṅga, Lāḍha (Rāḍha) in the Solasa Mahājanapadas (the sixteen powerful states of India) in the 6th century B.C. also suggest the familiarity of the Jaina monks with different parts of Bengal. The '*Kalpa Sūtra*' mentions four great centres of the Jaina monks in Bengal viz. Tāmālitiya (Tāmrālipta), Kodivārsya (Kotivarsha), Puṇḍravardhana and Khaobadiya (of Karvāta)¹⁷. From the writings of *Kalpasūtra* it appears that Jainism had a strong foothold in Bengal, otherwise these four centres could not have flourished in Bengal.

Jainism maintained its influences in Bengal for a long time. Even after the fall of the Mauryas, Jainism was in a flourishing condition in Bengal. A *Mathurā Inscription* of the second century A.D. mentions the erection of a Jaina image at the request of a Jaina monk¹⁸ of the Rāḍhā country. From the discovery of a copper plate (A. 12) within the ruins of the temple of Pāhāḍpur, we come to know about an endowment by a Brāhmin and his wife for the maintenance of requisites (such as sandal, incense, flowers, lamps, etc.) of the worship of Ārhatas and the construction of a resting place at the Vihāra of Vātagohali¹⁹.

When Hiuen-Tsang visited India, he noticed a large number of Jains living at Vaiśālī (in Bihār), Samatāṭa, Puṇḍravardhana²⁰. (in Bengal) and Kalinga (Orissa). His descriptions clearly reveal that Jainism had maintained its powerful influence in Bengal at least upto the first half of the 7th century A.D.

From the images of the Jain monks, so far discovered from Bengal, it appears that the Digambara school had a firm footing in Bengal as most of the images of the Jaina saints of Bengal

belonged to the Digambara sect. North Bengal was an important centre of Jainism even to the Pāla times.

Although Jainism had been preached in Bengal from the very early times, the hold of Jainism was to some extent weak in Bengal. The Jain monks could not inspire the inhabitants of Bengal into the doctrine en-masse. The rigidity of the Jain school was not favoured by the native people. They did not prefer the rules and customs of the sect. Jainism had not received any royal patronage in Bengal.

The gradual progress of Hinduism in the religious fields of Bengal stood in the way of the survival of Jainism, although it maintained its existence upto the Pāla period.

Even in the Sena period a few Jain monks lived here and there in the districts of Bānkura and Puruliā.

Ājivikisms : Like Jainism Ājivikism had got entrance into Bengal in the very early times. Mahākālīputra Gosāla, the founder of the sect, is said to have visited Bengal to preach the doctrine of Ājivikism and stayed in Bengal for six years for this purpose²¹.

Mahāvīra Vardhamāna, the last Tirthāṅkara (preceptor) of Jainism, during the time of his preaching in Rāḍha country, had found some ascetics called 'maskārins'²². Some scholars think that these maskārins belonged to the Ājivika sect.

The Ājivikas were active in preaching their doctrine from the 6th century B.C. Besides Rāḍha, they preached their doctrines in Puṇḍravardhana, which became a centre of Ājivikism in the 3rd century²³ B.C. Hiuen-Tsang could not at first, make any distinction between the Jaina school and the Ājivika school. After the departure of Hiuen Tsang from India, Ājivikism was not much heard of. Ājivikas might have been merged with the Nirgrantha sect of Jainism²⁴. It can be remembered that they had no separate existence in the Pāla period. But they have had some influence in the Nātha cult of Bengal. Dr. B. N. Barua suggests that "in the Nāthism of Bengal as in that of other places, one may trace the recrudescence and continuity of the doctrines and practices of the Ājivikas"²⁵.

Brāhmaṇism: Though Brāhmaṇism had entered Bengal in

much early times, it had been placed on a solid base in Bengal from the time of the Guptas. The patronage of the Gupta rulers and their high officials towards the religion made it popular to the native people of Bengal gradually.

From the '*Dāmodarpur Copper Plate Inscriptions*' of Budhagupta we come to know about the donation of lands to the Brāhmaṇas in response to an application by a grāmika who wished to settle some prominent Brahmanas in his village²⁶. From the records we come to know that there was no dearth of the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal in the 5th and 6th century in A.D. They were well acquainted with the Vedic practices and rituals. The growing popularity of Brāhmaṇism in Bengal in the Gupta period can be found in the contemporary inscriptions. From another inscription of Budhagupta, we come to know that high officials as well as native people had showed great interest to donate lands for the construction of temples in their locality²⁷. The Gupta rulers and their officials had encouraged the people of Bengal to accept Brāhmaṇism. Their efforts were, to a great extent, fruitful.

The contemporary copper plate inscriptions of the Gupta rulers like the *Dhanaidaha Copper Plate Inscriptions* of Kumāragupta-I²⁸, the *Baigram Copper Plate Inscriptions*²⁹, the *Mallasarul Copper Plate Inscriptions* of Gopa Chandra and Vijaya Sena³⁰ of the 6th century A.D. suggest that not only the cultivated lands but also waste lands were given as gifts for the settlements of the Brāhmaṇas. The *Tipperā Copper Plate Inscriptions* of Lokenāth also shows that the prayer for lands by the Brāhmaṇas for the purpose of constructing temples were generally granted by the rulers. It also indicates the growing ascendancy of the Brāhmaṇas and the Vedic culture in the socio-religious life of eastern India before the rise of the Pālas. Bengal was no longer regarded as the land of the vrātyas or there was no question of punishment for visiting the land. These inscriptions not only tell us the immigration of the Brāhmaṇas to Bengal from Madhyadeśa and other parts of India, but also the emigration of the Bengalee Brāhmins to other part of India. Professor Taponāth Chakravarty suggests that such stories of immigration might have invented the

stories of inviting Brāhmaṇas from Kaṇauj to Bengal by Ādisūra in later-times³¹. However, Professor Chakravarty and other modern scholars think that the base of these stories is weak. These inscriptions of the Gupta period also reveal the fact that there was no dearth of well versed Brāhmaṇas in the Gupta and the postGupta periods. These Brāhmaṇas were well-versed in the Vedas and the Vedic rituals. So there was no question of importing Brāhmaṇas from Kaṇauj or other parts of India in later times.

The Neo-Brāhmaṇical Hinduism of the Gupta period influenced the religious life of Bengal. The introduction of the new Purāṇic deities and conceptions and the transformation of the Vedic gods and goddesses into new mythology brought about a great change in the Brāhmaṇical Hinduism. Its influences can be noticed in the Hindu society of Bengal.

The worship of Viṣṇu, Śiva and Umā had been introduced. Śrī Lakṣmī had been accepted as the Hindu Goddess. The acceptance of the new gods and goddesses in Hindu faith, in course of time, also paved the way for the Tantrik school. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee thinks³² that the Tantras had a pre-Aryan origin. The acceptance of the Pre-Aryan gods and goddesses along with their practices and rituals brought about a great change in the Hindu philosophy. It encouraged the Hindu society of Bengal to recognise the local gods and goddesses of the native people and to bring about a synthesis between the Aryan and Non-Aryan cultures. But it was made slowly and through a process of evolution.

The Vedic-Purāṇic Hinduism of Bengal had been free from the influences of the Tāntric school at least upto the 8th century A.D.³³. But afterwards the Tāntric school received recognition from the Hindu society. It also received recognition from the Mahāyāna school of Bengal as already noted.

Different sects within Hinduism: Among the different schools of Hinduism, the three schools, viz, the Vaishṇava school, the Śakta school and the Śāiva school had become very popular in ancient Bengal.

Vaishṇavism: Vaishṇavism had been thoroughly preached

in Bengal from the time of the Guptas. It is already noted that the thorough Āryanisation had been started in Bengal during the reign of the Gupta rulers. They were the patrons of Bhāgavāta Hinduism. They called themselves as Parama Bhāgavatas. The images of Lakshmī, wife of Viṣṇu, had been portrayed on their coins. Skandagupta, in his *Junāgaḍ Inscription* has paid his homage to god Viṣṇu. From these evidences it can be presumed that Vaishṇavism had received a new impetus in eastern India from the time of the Guptas. From the inscriptions of the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods we learn about the existence of a number of Viṣṇu temples in Bengal.

The Śuśunīā Inscription (of the Bankura district) refers to the setting up of a wheel of Viṣṇu by king Chandravarman (who ruled at Pushkaraṇa in the 4th century A.D.) on the back wall of a cave in the hill Śuśunīa³⁴. The inscription refers to the dedication of the cave to Chakrasvāmin. i.e. Viṣṇu. The *Vaigram Copper Plate* (dated GE 128 447-8 AD) mentions a temple of Govindasvāmin. The Inscription also refers to a gift of land for the maintenance of the temple and to perform the daily worship³⁵. The *Dāmodarpur Inscriptions* (in the Dinājpur district of modern Bangladesh) tell us about the purchase of land for the purpose of construction of two temples of Śvetavarāhasvāmin and Kokāmukhasvāmin³⁶. Śvetavārāha Svāmin is a name of Viṣṇu. Some scholars suggest that Kokāmukhasvāmin is also a name of Viṣṇu, while others think that it is a name of Śhiva³⁷. In the *Gunāighar Pattaulis* we have the name of a temple of Pradyumneśwar³⁸. Pradyumneśwar is also a name of Viṣṇu. The *Loknāth Pattaulis* of the 7th century A.D., describe the worship of god Ananta-Nārayaṇa in the Tripura district³⁹. The *Kailān Pattaulis*⁴⁰ of the 7th century A.D. describes Śrīdharan Rāt of the Rāta dynasty as a devoted Vaishṇava. He was a worshipper of Purusottama. These inscriptions reveal the gradual progress of Vaishṇavism in Bengal.

From the terracottas and images discovered at different places of Bengal, it can be presumed that Vaishṇava cult was very popular in Bengal in the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods.

From the epigraphic records it also appears that god Viṣṇu

was known in Bengal by various names such as Vishnu, Hari, Govindasvāmin, Śvetavarāhsvāmin, Kokāmukhasvāmin, Ananta Nārāyaṇa, Nārāyaṇa. etc. we may accept the associations of these names within the Vaishṇava cult.

The arcaeological evidences of Pāhāḍpur and the other epigraphic records clearly indicate the popularity of the Vaishṇava cult in Bengal since the time of the Guptas. Jayanāga, a ruler of the post-Gupta period seems to have professed Vaishṇavism, as indicated by the chākra standard on his coins⁴¹. The title Parambhagavata conferred on him in his Vāppāghosavāta charter⁴² also makes it clear that he was a devoted Vaishṇava.

In this connection it can be mentioned that the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa episode, which became very popular in mediaeval Bengal, had been introduced here either in the post-Gupta period or in the Pāla period, Kṛishṇa is the supreme god in Vaishṇava school, whereas Rādhā is the female energy of Kṛishṇa. The idea of Rādhā must have taken a definite shape before the appearance of Jaydeva (of the 12th century A.D.) the author of '*Gita-govinda*'. The terracottas of Pāhāḍpur had been engraved for the purpose of decoration, not for worship. It can be presumed that the story of the Rāmāyaṇa and Kṛishṇāyana had become very popular in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods⁴³. Vaishṇavism began to flourish in Bengal since the Gupta Age.

Saivism: The Śaiva school had become popular in Bengal from the time of the Guptas. Śiva, originally a God of the non-Aryan tribes had been accepted by Hinduism from the later Vedic Age. He had been identified with Vedic Rudra or Maheśvara. It is already noted that the supremacy of the triad, viz, Brahmā, Vishṇu, Maheśvara, had been accepted from the time of the Guptas. It had helped to develop the Śaivite school in Bengal, though the scholars are not sure how and when the Śaivite school had been introduced in Bengal.

The patronage of the Gupta rulers, no doubt, helped the school to establish itself on a solid base in Bengal. The presence of a Śaiva cult in the Tippearah district during the reign Vainya-

Gupta tells the existence of Śaivism in Bengal during the time of the Guptas. From the *Gunāigarh inscriptions* (of 508) of Vainyagupta, we come to know that Vainyagupta had styled himself as a Parama Śaiva⁴⁴. The appearance of the Bull-standard coins of Samāchārdeva, the Śhiva and Bull type on these of Śaśaṅka and the device of 'Bull alone' on the issue of Vīrsena show that Śaivism had gained its foothold in eastern India during the time of these rulers⁴⁵. The Āshrafpur plates of the Khādga dynasty suggest that in spite of their sincere devotion for Buddhism, the rulers had a great respect towards Śaivism⁴⁶. They inscribed bull on their coins, The Pāhādpur plates also suggest the popularity of the Śaiva cult in Bengal⁴⁷. In these plates Śiva had been represented in different poses.

Probhābatī, queen of Lokenāth of Tippearah, had established an image at Tippeār, which is described as Śarbānī, the female energy of Śarba (all mighty). Śarba is a form of god Rudra. The image has no difference with Bhadrakālī, Ambikā, Kshemāṅkarī etc., described in the text *Śaradā Tilaka*. It can be presumed that with the introduction of Śaivism, Śarbānī, the female energy of Śhiva used to get worship from the people of Bengal.

Śāktaism: From the *Devīpurāṇa* (of the 7th or 8th century A.D.) we come to know about the existence of the Śākta cult in Rāḍha, Varendra, Kāmṛūpa and Bhotta Desha (Tibet). If the statement of the *Devīpurāṇa* is true, the Śākta cult had been introduced in Bengal before the 7th or 8th century A.D.⁴⁸.

An indirect evidence of the presence of the Śākta cult can be found in the works of *Jayadratha Yāmala*⁴⁹, which had been written in the Post-Gupta period. In this work, different forms of Śakti or Kālī like Ishān Kālī, Rakshmā Kālī, Vīrjya Kālī, Prajñā Kālī, etc. had been mentioned. Professor N. R. Roy thinks that the Śākta cult had been introduced in Bengal when Brāhmaṇism had its way in Bengal⁵⁰. In later times Bengal became a centre of Śāktaism. A section of the Śākta worshippers had been converted into Tāntricism from the Pāla period. They might have been influenced by the Tāntricism of the Buddhists of Bengal.

Different forms of Śakti, viz, Chaṇḍī, Mahishamardini, Nava-Durgā etc. had been worshipped in Bengal in the Pāla period. Most of the images of Śakti, so far discovered in Bengal, belonged either to Pāla period or to Sena period. But the base of Śāktaism had been built in the Post-Gupta period.

Sauraism: The worship of Sun God (Saura) had been, probably, introduced in Bengal from the time of the Guptas. It is generally believed that the God who had been introduced in Bengal was different from the Vedic Sun God⁵¹. This God had been introduced in India by the Iranian priests and Śakas⁵². But ultimately it had been accepted by Hindu school. Two images of the Sun God have been discovered at Kāmārpur and Niyāmatpur in the Rājsāhi district of Bangladesh, which show distinct traces of Kushāṇa features. Among the other images one has been discovered at Deora in Bagura (in Bangladesh) and another at Cossipur in the 24 Parganas. These images belonged to the Gupta period. Recent excavations in different places of Bengal have also yielded a number of images of the Sun God. It indicates the worship of the cult in the Gupta and Post-Gupta period. In the Sena period, the Saura cult received the patronage of the Sena rulers like Viśwarūpa Sena and Keśhava Sena.

Unlike other parts of Northern India Śaiva Gaṇapatya school had not flourished in Bengal. Though a number of images have been discovered in different parts of Bengal, Gaṇeśh images, found at Pāhāḍpur demonstrate the artistic skill of the image makers of Bengal.

Kalhaṇa in his works, *Rājataranginī*⁵³ mentions a Kārtikeya temple at Puṇḍravardhana in the 8th century. Though the worship of the God had been introduced in Bengal, the God was not so popular as Viṣṇu or Śakti. Besides Kārtikeya, the names of Gods like Indra, Agni, Rebanta, Bṛhaspati, Kuber, Gaṅgā Yamunā, etc. can be found in the inscriptions, but they did not have any significant importance in the religious life of Bengal.

It is already noted that before the advent of the Aryan people, the native people had built up their own religious faith and culture, they followed a number of religious customs and

practices, which had proto-Austroloid and Drāvadian origin, when the Aryan faith and culture spread out in Bengal a religious conflict might have taken place. But ultimately it led to a religious synthesis. Although a number of old practices and customs had been abolished with the progress of time, the Hindu society of Bengal could not wipe out the old practices and customs from the minds of the native people. The Neo-Hinduism of Bengal had to accept a number of customs and practices of the non-Aryna tribes. They were to accept charak festival, Rathayātrā, Holi (or Halak), Manasā Puja etc. of the non-Aryan society as a part of their religion. The process of absorption must have been started from the very early times. Accepting the customs and practices of the Non-Aryan people the leaders of the Aryan society and the ruling class (from the Gupta Age) had showed their prudence and wisdom.

Some charges of religious intolerances against Śaśāṅka had been made by Hiuen Tsang. Śaśāṅka is said to have cut down the Bodhi tree at Gaya and ordered for the removal of an image of Buddha from a neighbouring temple. Such religious intolerance on the part of a king was undoubtedly rare in Bengal. But the scholars like Dr. N. R. Roy think that Śaśāṅka did this for political and economic reasons, not for religious intolerance⁵⁴. It can be suspected that the Buddhist śramaṇas of Bodh Gaya had an active support to Harshavardhana against Śaśāṅka. It was rather political purpose than religious connection. If Śaśāṅka was anti-Buddhist in nature, the Buddhist Vihāras and temples could not have flourished in Bengal in his reign. Hiuen Tsang, in his works, admits the religious tolerance of Bengal. He has noticed a vast Buddhist Vihāra near Karṇa Suvarṇa⁵⁵, the capital of Śaśāṅka.

From the story of Śaśāṅka it appears that though sometimes the rulers might have assumed a bitter attitude against other religious sects for political reasons, the common people were tolerant and they were eager for peaceful co-existence. They did not hesitate to donate lands for the construction of temples to other religious sects. They paid homage to the gods and

perceptors of other sects. There might be some exceptions, but these exceptions may be overlooked.

Hinduism had been gaining its strength since the time of the Guptas. Buddhism had also a strong base in Bengal. So a rivalry between these two religions was not an uncommon thing. But in spite of the keen contest between the leaders of these two religions, the common people maintained peace and harmony. The Buddhist Sramanas and the learned Brahmanas earned high respect from them. The rulers also showed their respect to other religions. It is already noted that the Gupta rulers donated lands for Buddhist Viharas and a queen of the Khadga dynasty in spite of her devotion to Buddhism, had built the Śārbāṇī temple in their kingdom.

Jayanātha, a minister of Śrīdharaṇa of the Rāṭadynasty of Samatata, was a devout vaishnava, but he donated lands to the Buddhist monks and Brahmanas simultaneously.

From the description of I-Tsing, it appears that both the Brāhmaṇas and Buddhist monks maintained an austere life.

From the contemporary sources it appears that in the Post-Gupta period Jainism and other anti-Vedic schools like Chhāvargi schools were on the road to decline. The lack of missionary activities and other weaknesses undermined their hold in Bengal.

Though Śāktism, was not very powerful, in this period, it had been making its base in Bengal.

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B. SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RITES, CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS OF BENGAL

Like other parts of India, the people of ancient Bengal might have formed some ideas about their religious faiths and beliefs, though we have very little written information about the beliefs, customs and practices of Bengal of the Pre-Aryan period. From the archaeological evidences there are reasons to believe that their religious faiths and beliefs had been influenced by nature. Like other non-Aryan tribes (mainly Proto-Australoids and Dravidian) of India they began to worship the trees and animals and the forces of nature on which they depended for their prosperity and happiness. To please their Gods and Goddesses they sacrificed animals. They buried the dead and the worship of the mother Goddesses had become prevalent¹. The worship of Linga (phallic worship), stones etc. were common to them. Some of their Gods and Goddesses were regarded as the power of procreation while others were connected with the production of crops and the fertility of the soil. In this connection it can be reminded that some of the Non-Aryan tribes of ancient India believed that a female energy was the source of all creations and the people were to worship her if she was to be pleased. Even in the ruins of the Indus valley the symbol of the female energy is to be noticed². Bengal was not an exception to it. The Phallic worship had been introduced here also. A number of images of the female energy which are kept in the Tāmralipta Museum (which are collected through excavations) prove that the female energy had been worshipped in ancient Bengal. From different evidences Dr. R.C. Majumdar also thinks that they buried the dead in an east-west orientation and their religion mainly centred round the worship of mother Goddess³. The excavations of the Pāndu Rājār Dhibi (about the first millennium B.C.) of Borāchhāinpā and Chandra Ketu gaḍ also support the theory of the worship of the mother Goddess.

It is evident that the customs, practices as well as the religious beliefs of the native tribes of Bengal had taken a clear shape before the advent of the Aryan people⁴. The native tribes who lived in Bengal might have been influenced by each other, though we do not have any clear idea about the origin of their beliefs and practices and the relation of the tribes of Bengal with each other. However, it appears that these customs and practices of the native tribes had a solid foundation in Bengal and they had little similarity with the customs and practices of the Aryan society of Northern India. Even after the migration of the Aryans, the native tribes of Bengal maintained their separate identity for a long time, and as late as the post-Gupta period they did not give up their old customs and practices completely.

So when the Aryans of Northern India were engaged in composing the hymns of the Vedas and Upanishadas, Bengal had continued to allow the old customs and practices of the native tribes. The cult., of the dead, worship of fertility power in man and nature in the form of mother Goddess, magic incarnation, Veneration for totems, worship of rivers, trees and fields dominated the minds of the native people of Bengal. Even after Aryanisation of a large section of the people of Bengal, they followed the beliefs, customs and practices of their ancestors. Later on, an attempt had been made to bring a synthesis between the customs and practices of the Aryan people of Northern India and those of the Non-Aryan tribes of Bengal But it had to take a long time to give a definite shape.

The religious rites, ceremonies and festivals of present day Bengal were the products of the synthesis of the Aryan and the Non-Aryan culture of Bengal.

The beliefs, customs and practices of the native tribes of Bengal were at first looked down upon by the Vedic-Aryans. They discouraged the people of their community to visit the land by imposing restrictions. The *Baudhyāyana Dharma Sutra* (1,1,2,13-15) prescribed a penance for visiting the land. But their efforts met little success, In spite of the restrictions of the *Smṛitikārs*, the *Śaṇnyāsins*, the *Sārthavāhas* (business men) etc. used to visit the

land from the early period, even much earlier than the visit of Gautama Buddha and Mahāvīra to Bengal. The visit of the land by the Aryan people indirectly paved the way for establishing a cultural link between the people of Northern India and Bengal. Having established their hold over the land, the Aryan society tried to wipe out the Non-Aryan customs and practices from the soil of Bengal. We have already noted that they met little success in this respect. In spite of the opposition of the Vedic School, the beliefs, rituals, ceremonies and deities of the Non-Aryan people had great impact on the Hindu society of Bengal.

The process of absorption of the Non-Aryan customs and ceremonies by the Aryan Schools (like the Buddhist, Jains etc) probably, had been started even before the advent of the Brāhmanic school in Bengal. A section of the Buddhists in Bengal adopted some rituals, deities and beliefs of the native tribes of Bengal. The Goddess Parnaśavarī (of the Śavar tribe) had been accepted by the Vajrayāna School of Bengal when the vajrayāna school had flourished in Bengal. The Tantric philosophy, though had a non-Aryan origin, had got recognition from a section of the Buddhists of Bengal from the post-Gupta period.

So it was not surprising to us when we find the practices and ceremonies of the non-Aryan tribes side by side with the customs, ceremonies and festivals of the Aryan community in Bengalee society. The festivals like Holi or *Holak* (Spring festival), *Charak*, *Gājan* (connected with the worship of Śhiva), *Navānna* (Harvesting festival), *Paus-pārvaṇa* etc. and the worship of Gods and Goddesses like *Manasā*, *Dharma Thākur*, *Bhairav*, *Śitalā*, *Sasthī*, *Pañchānanda*, *Dakṣiṇā Roy*, *Kalu Roy*, *Mākāl Thākur* etc., though they have non-Aryan origin, they have now got recognition from the Hindu society of Bengal. Some of the rites, customs and practices like the use of rice, of banana tree, cocoanut, betel leaf, betel nuts, use of cow-dung, conch-shells during the time of religious worship⁵ and the practices of the Hindu women of Bengal of painting the forehead with red-lead and the sacrifice of animals to Gods and Goddesses, although are of Austric origin, they have now become a part of Hinduism.

Besides these practices, most of the *Vrātas*, and *Striāchāras* (customs of Women) which are observed by the women in different occasions are of Austro-Dravidian origin. They have little relation with the Vedic philosophy. No Brāhmaṇa priest is required for observing the *Vrāta* and festivals like *Navāṇna*, *Paus-Pārvāna* etc⁶.

The absorption of the rites, ceremonies and festivals of the native tribes of Bengal by the Hindu society had started since the Gupta period. It is already noted that Bengal embraced the Brahmanical culture firmly after the inclusion of the country under the Gupta rule. The Gupta rulers made serious attempts to convert the land into Hinduism. But at first the orthodox Brāhmaṇical school probably assumed a bitter attitude against the religious rites, ceremonies and festivals of the Non-Aryan School. But inspite of the opposition from the Brāhmaṇical community, the customs, practices and ceremonies of the Non-Aryan tribes which had a strong foundation in Bengal had been able to maintain their existence. Considering their influence and popularity among the native people, the liberal leaders of the Brahmanical society had given them recognition in their society subsequently. The spread of Islam in mediaeval time also forced the Hindu society of Bengal to include the customs and practices of the native people in their religion in later times. Otherwise they might have been converted to Islam.

The process of absorption of the rites, ceremonies and festivals of the Non-Aryan tribes by the Hindu society seems to have started with the conversion of the Non-Aryan tribes of Bengal into Hinduism. The gradual conversion of the Non-Aryan tribes to Hinduism and the process of bringing about a synthesis between the rites, ceremonies and festivals of the non-Aryan society and those of the Aryan society made the Pre-Pāla period distinct and significant.

The remarks of Dr. R.C. Majumdar about the conversion of the native tribes of Bengal require some discussions. He says, "It is a law of history that when a highly civilised people conquer, primitive people, the latter gradually imbibe the culture of the

former to such an extent that in course of time only a few traces of their primitive culture are left. This happened also in Bengal and generally the entire population was Aryanised with the exception of a handful of people living in isolation in hills and forests"⁷.

The remarks of Dr. R.C. Majumdar indicate the backwardness of the native people of Bengal in respect of culture as well as religious beliefs and practices. But there are reasons to believe that the people who lived in Bengal before the advent of the Aryans were not far behind than the Aryan society in respect of cultural development. Dr. Majumdar himself admits 'the excavation of Pāṇḍu Rājār Dhibi have revealed that the Bengalees of those days were capable of building town with pavements and streets. They knew that, use of copper, agriculture and trade were the mainstay of the economy'⁸. The above statement of Dr. Majumdar certainly proves the cultural advancement of the people of Bengal in the early period. Secondly, we have already noted that inspite of the opposition of the orthodox section, the Aryan society could not prevent the native people of Bengal from observing the rites, ceremonies and festivals of their own even after their conversion into Hinduism. On the other hand the Hindu society of Bengal had given recognition to a large number of ceremonies, rites and festivals of the Non-Aryan society and absorbed them in their religion. The *Smṛitikāra* of Bengal gave them recognition inspite of their Austro-Dravidian origin. If the Socio-religious rites and ceremonies of the early times had a weak hold upon the people, they could not have survived after the advent of the Brāhmaṇical Hinduism in Bengal.

The old inscriptions, literatures and the accounts of the foreign travellers throw important light on the socio-religious rites, ceremonies and festivals of ancient Bengal. Besides the non-Aryan rites and ceremonies, we can get valuable informations from them about the Jain, Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical socio-religious customs and rituals of Bengal during the post-Gupta and the Pre-Pālā periods.

From these sources we come to know that the Jains and

Buddhists had exercised considerable influence on the religious life of Bengal. Buddhists of Bengal had adopted some of the Gods and Goddesses of the native people like Kśhetrapālā^{8A}, Bāshuli^{8B} Parnasavari^{8C} etc. in their own faith. They were to be worshipped by them. The *Charyāpada Songs* give a clear hint about it.

The Chinese Pilgrims inform us about the religious ceremonies of the Buddhist community of Bengal. They used to worship the Bodhisttava Avalokitaśvara in the Buddhist temples and erect the Aśoke-Topa (Stūpa) near the Buddhist monasteries. From the writings of Seng-Chi who visited India in the 7th century A.D. we know that the king of Samatāṭa who was a fervent worshipper of tri rantra^{8D} played the part of a great upāsaka. He was a pious follower of Buddhism and had erected a large number of statues of Buddha. He used to take out processions in honour of Buddha with an image of Avalokitśvara at the front⁹. Hiuen Tsang mentions three monasteries in the country in which milk products were not taken as food in accordance with the teaching of Buddha.

It is already noted that the systematic preachings of Brāhmanism had been started in Bengal since the time of the Guptas, though the Brāhmanical culture had begun to penetrate the land even before the 6th century B.C. After the advent of Brahmanism in Bengal, a number of native people engaged in religious worship and sacraments, were raised to the ranks of the Brāhmanism, though the Brāhmanical community placed majority of the native tribes in the position of the Śudras¹⁰.

Through a long and continuous process the native people had accepted the manners and customs of the Brāhmanical faith, but they did not give up their old rites and ceremonies totally. The wisdom and prudence of the liberal Brāhmanical school, inspite of the opposition of the orthodox school, induced the Brāhmanical society to give recognition to the customs and practices of the non-Aryan community. But Brāhmanism could not convert the native tribes who lived in forests and hills and were isolated from the plain land. They lived outside the

jurisdiction of the Brāhmanical school and continued to observe customs and practices of their own.

With the introduction of Brāhmanism a number of new socio-religious rites and ceremonies concerning every stage of a man's life had been introduced in Bengal (from the conception in the mother's womb to death and even beyond it) following the instructions of Manu.

From the different inscriptions of the Gupta period like *Baigrām Copper Plate Inscriptions*, *Dāmodarpur Copper Plate Inscriptions*¹¹, Guṇāigarh Inscription etc., it is known that the Bhrāmaṇas who began to settle in Bengal were well-versed in the Vedas and the Vedic rites. It may be presumed that they put emphasis on the observance of the Vedic rites and ceremonies and from the Gupta period the attempt to introduce the Vedic rituals to Bengal had been started. It is already noted that the Brāhmanic faith could not abolish the rites and ceremonies of the Pre-Aryan Austro-Dravidian races. There was a spirit of compromise and adoption among the different sections of the people which brought about a desirable synthesis in the religious life of the people of Bengal.

From the works of the Pāla and Sena periods (we have not got any authentic source for the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods) we come to know that the people, belonging to upper castes of Hinduism were to observe the ceremonies like Gārbhadhana (the ceremony of impregnation), *Puṁsevana* (the ceremony to ensure the birth of male progeny), *Simānta unnayana* (the ceremony of parting the hair), *Jāta Karmaṇa* (the ceremony performed at the birth of a male child), *Nishkarmaṇa* (the ceremony of taking out a child from the first time in the open air), *Nāma Karna*. (the naming of the child), *Anna Prāsana* (the ceremony of giving solid food to a child), *Chudā Karna* (the ceremony of Tansuṅa), *Upanayana* (the ceremony of investing sacred thread to a boy), *Samāvartana* (the returning ceremony of the students to their homes from the house of their preceptors), *Vivāha* (marriage) and others. Probably, most of these ceremonies and festivals of the Hindu society had been introduced in Bengal since the Gupta period, (from the time of

migration of the Brāhmaṇa families from Northern India). The people of Bengal began to worship the Vedic deities like Indra, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu, Madana and others from the time of the Guptas.

Though we are not sure for the lack of authentic records how far these ceremonies and rituals had been observed in different parts of Bengal in the Pre-Pāla period, it is sure that among them a number of ceremonies like Jātkarmaṇa (the ceremony performed at the birth of the child) *chuḍā karaṇa* (the ceremony of Tausura), *Āṇṇprāsana* (the ceremony of giving solid food), *Nāmakaraṇa* (the naming of the child), *Upanayana* (the ceremony of investing sacred thread to a boy) etc. were of Vedic origin and these ceremonies seemed to have been introduced into Bengal since the time of the Guptas. A great number of people belonging to the upper castes, who came from Northern India, probably began to observe these ceremonies in Bengal. The exact performance of these ceremonies necessitated several functions like *Kuśhaṇḍikā*, the *homas*, the *Mahāvījahṛiti*, *Satyāyan* etc. prescribed by the Vedas. The Vedic mantras and verses were recited during the time of the observance of rites and ceremonies of Hinduism. It is already mentioned that from the Inscriptions of the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods we learn that the Brāhmaṇas of Bengal were well-versed in the Vedas. They strictly followed the instructions of the Vedas to perform the ceremonies. In this context it may be pointed out that by the time of the Guptas the Brāhmaṇical society of India had assumed a conservative attitude and emphasis was given on the exact performance of the Brāhmaṇical rituals. But the circumstances in Bengal were to some extent different from the other parts of Northern India. Here the influences of the Buddhist society and Non-Aryan people were still strong. So the native people of Bengal did not possibly follow the Brāhmaṇical rituals very strictly. The Brāhmaṇical society had to make adjustment with the non-Aryan communities. Both the Aryan and non-Aryan communities began to observe the ceremonies and festivals like *Dhvājā Pujā*, *Holi*, *Charak*, *Gājan*, *Ambubāchi*, *Śavarotsava* and other ceremonies. They were to

worship the Gods and Goddesses like Chāṇḍī, Manashā, Pañ-Chānanda, Parnaśavarī, Jangulī, Sasthī and others which have non-Aryan origin. The contemporary literatures throw some light on the religious ceremonies and festivals of Bengal of the Post-Gupta period.

Dhavajā worship: From the very ancient times, the native people of Bengal, like other parts of India used to worship the *Dhavajā* or flags of several Gods and Goddess, Generally, the people belonging to a cult used to worship the *Dhavajā* or flag of their particular deity. The names of kings like Tāmradhavajā, Mayuradhavajā or Haṁsadhavajā indicate their close relation with a particular clan or tribe who used to worship Tāmra Dhavajā Mina Dhavajā, Mayura Dhavajā, Gaḍura-Dhavajā, Haṁsa-Dhavajā, Śatru Dhavajā etc^{11A}. The worship of Dhavajā or flags depicted with particular animal or bird indicated the close relation of the native people with animal Kingdom. There are reasons to believe that the worship of Dhavajā had become popular in ancient Bengal¹². Even to-day the people belonging to the Sañthal, Rajvamshi, Muṇḍā, Khasia community can not perform their religious functions without worshipping the Dhavajā of their own cult¹³.

Tree worship: Since the time of the Indus civilisation the native people used to worship some trees viz, banyan trees, peepul tree (the holy fig tree), bel tree (wood apple tree), basil tree etc. the ancient literatures of Bengal throw some light on the custom of the tree-worship. From *Sadauktikarṇāmṛita* and different *Maṅgal Kāvya*s we come to know that Kshetrapal was a folk God of Bengal. He is to be worshipped under a tree¹⁴. It can be presumed from the literatures of ancient Bengal that the holy trees were planted at the end of the village and they were worshipped by the people on an auspicious day.

Holi Utsava (or Holaka) : Holi (or Holaka) was an old festival of India. It had been probably introduced in Bengal much before the Gupta rule. It had a non-Aryan origin. The utsava had once a close relation with the fertility of the soil and for good cultivation of land. *Kāmāsūtra* of Vātsyāyana¹⁵ (a work of the 3rd or 4th

century A.D.) mentions the festival. The utsava had been observed in Bengal on the full moon day of Fālguna. The people used to observe the festival by singing and dancing. Subsequently it had been included by the Hindu society of Northern India (as well as Bengal). Homa and other usages were added to it. In later times the story of love between Rādhā and Kṛishṇa of the Vaishṇava cult of the Hindu society had been added to give it a religious flavour.

Chaḍaka: Chaḍaka was an old popular festival of Bengal. Now it has been connected with the worship of Śhiva. The festival must have had a non-Aryan origin. The worshippers of *Chaḍaka* festival (i.e. Gājan Saṇṇyāsis,) even to-day are looked down by the caste Hindus of Bengal.

In order to perform the religious function the worshippers used to place Śhiva linga (which was called Buḍā Shiva) on a pot full of water and they performed some functions like the worship of crocodile, jumping on the thorns and knives and to stich the arrows on their body etc. They worshipped the Hāzra tree on the crematory ground or on a lonely place. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that it was based of the tribal ideas of regeneration¹⁶.

Kāmamahotsava · From the contemporary literatures of ancient India we come to know a festival named Kāmamahotsava observed in different parts of India. The festival is mentioned in the works of Vātsyāyana¹⁷. It has also been mentioned in the works like *Mālatī Mādhava*, a Sanskrit play of the 8th century A.D. It was a spring festival and took place in Bengal in the month of Chaitra to please Madan and Rati, the God and Goddess of love. The worship of God and Goddess took place under Ashoke tree. From the works of the contemporary writers it appears that the people who joined in the festival used to dance with objectionable expressions accompanied with music and obscene remarks. Probably the festival has been merged with Holi in or before the 16th century A.D. The festival has not been mentioned after 16th century A.D.¹⁸.

Kojāgarh Utsav : *Kojāgarh utsav* is observed in Bengal in the full-moon night in the month of Āshvina. It was a popular festival

in ancient Bengal. Probably the utsāva had a non-Aryan origin and had been introduced much before the advent of Brāhmanism in Bengal. The people used to eat pressed rice (chipitaka) and cocoanut water in the night along with their friends and relations. The Kojāgarh utsav was also popular in northern India. Vātsyāyanā in his works says that the people used to play dice throughout the sleepless night for which the night is also called Koumud-Jagar¹⁹.

Śatrothana : The festival was celebrated to please Indra. The people used to build a flag staff to observe the *Śatrothana* festival; the flag staff was dedicated to the God. The festival was attended with much enthusiasm by the Kings, the nobility and the Brāhmanas.

Śavarautsava: The Śavaras were a native tribe of Bengal. From the *Charyā songs* (of Savarapada) it appears that the Śavaras lived in hills²⁰. A number of sculptures on the life of the Śavaras are found in the Pāhāḍpur plates. From these plates it appears that they had a close relation with the life of common men²¹. Their ceremonies and festivals were very popular in ancient Bengal. Even the later works *Kālvivek*²² mentions a festival named Śavarautsav which was observed on the dashami tithi in the autumnal worship of Durgāpujā.

It was a peculiar kind of merry making. People who used to take part in the festival covered their body with leaves etc. and besmear themselves with mud and other things. They sang obscene songs and danced at random. They also beat the drums. It was believed that by this way they avoided the rage and curse of the Goddess Bhagavati²³. The festival had a pure Austric origin and it indicated the close relation of the inhabitants of Bengal with Austric Culture.

Yātrās: The native tribes of Bengal observed a number of Yātrās, some of which have been accepted by the Brāhmanical society of Bengal. Among them we can mention the name of Rathayātrā, Snānayātrā and Dol Yātrā.

Though the Aryan society and the Buddhists did not like these social function, Asoka issued orders against these functions.

They had a solid base for which they could not be banned totally. They were to be accepted in later times.

Besides these festivals, a number of *vratas* and festivals like *Sukha-rātri-vrata* (observed in the month of Kārtika), *Paśhan Chaturdaśī* (celebrated in the month of Agrāhāyaṇa), *Dutya-Pratipada* (celebrated in the month of Kārtika), *Jaymaṅgal Vrata* (observed in the month of Jaiṣṭha), *Bhāduri Vrata* (observed in the month of Bhādra) etc. had been observed in ancient Bengal. But the contemporary literatures and other sources do not throw much light on these *Vratas* and festivals.

Most of the *Vratas* had a close connection with agriculture. They were observed to please the Gods of agriculture. A number of *Vratas* were observed in the harvesting season while some others were observed during the time of sowing seeds. Some of the *Vratas* expressed the religious ideas and beliefs of the native tribes; they would indicate their fate, if the year would be happy for them or not. They used to wear ornaments and costly clothes and attended the soiree. They dined in the company of intimate friends. At night they enjoyed the company of their favourite women in the decorated bed-room. On this occasion they also gave new clothes to their friends, relatives and the Brāhmanas.

Besides these festivals people used to perform a large number of *Vratas* and festivals like *Ambubāchi*, *Jhulān*, *Bhātri-Dvitiyā*, *Aśokāṣṭamī* etc. Some of these festivals had undoubtedly got much preference to the people of Bengal. They had a link with agriculture (or with the cultivation of land). A large number of *Vratas* insipits of their Austro-Dravidian origin are still very popular and they are also observed by the upper castes of the Hindu community.

It is already noted that the people of Bengal even after Aryanisation used to worship the deities who had Austro-Dravidian origin. From the literatures of the ancient period (as well as the early mediaeval period) we come to know that the people used to worship the deities like Parṇaśavarī, Ghaṭa Lakshmī, Jānguli Manashā etc.

Parṇaśavarī: The people of ancient Bengal used to worship

the Goddess Parnaśavarī. The term Śavarī indicates that at first she was the Goddess of the Śavaras. She was the destroyer of female spirit and disease. In later time the Buddhist Vajrayāna school of Bengal had accepted the Goddess in their cult. The Brāhmaṇical school of Bengal in later times had accepted the Goddess in their religion and she was known as Śabasaranam Bhagavati. The worship of Parnaśavarī was popular at least in the Śavara community in the ancient period.

Jānguli: She was also a Goddess of the Śavaras. Like Saraswatī she is fond of playing lute. She had been accepted by the Buddhists of Bengal as one of their deities. In later times the Brāhmaṇical society of Bengal identified her with the Saraswatī^{23A}. It was also imagined that she was identical with Brāhmanya Manashā.

Cāṇḍi (Chaṇḍi): Among the other deities who had been worshipped in ancient Bengal we can mention the name of Cāṇḍi (Chaṇḍi) who is regarded as one of the oldest deities²⁴. She has been worshipped in different names (like uran chaṇḍī) Betāi Chaṇḍi Makāḍ Chaṇḍi, Melāi chandi etc). A number of villages of Bengal have been named after her. At first she was the Goddess of the non-Aryan tribes for which she is not mentioned in the Vedas, Upanishadas and Epics²⁵. She has been accepted by the Hindu community of Bengal in the Muslim period. To make the deity popular, Mukundarāma Chakrabarty has to compose the 'Chaṇḍīmaṅgala' in the 16th century, to-day she is identical with Devī Durgā.

Pañchānanda; A popular deity of Bengal was Pañchānanda. A number of temples can be found in different parts of Uttar Rāḍhā and Dakshiṇā Rāḍha. He is not now regarded the God of forest. He is identical with Śiva and sometimes with Batuka Bhairava.

To discuss about the origin of Pañchānanda, Gopendra Kṛishṇa Bose in his works, 'Banglār Loukik Deva' says²⁷ possibly at first he was the God of Brātyā people, later he got recognition of the Aryan community. He also says that in the Pre-Aryan period a number of tribes and communities had settled in Bengal;

some of the tribes left the land when the Aryan community came to settle here. Among them were the Dravadian races, who were much advanced in culture. The Dravadians, who did not leave the land, had to accept the Aryan culture. Their God Pañchānanda had been elevated as Śiva or Śiva-putra (son of Śiva). In later times Pañchānanda maintained his separate identity. Dharma Ṭhākur could not secure the place of Pañchānanda in later times inspite of his popularity.

Manashā: The Goddess Manasha was not at first accepted by the Brāhmaṇical society of Bengal, But she was very popular among the native tribes of Bengal. The snakes were regarded as the symbol of procreation by the native tribes and for the purpose of procreation they began to worship the deity. She had been accepted by the Brāhmaṇical society of Bengal at least from the Pāla period. In the Pre-Pāla period she was possibly regarded as the Goddess of the non-Aryan people of Bengal.

Besides these deities, probably a large number of folk Gods and Goddesses had been worshipped in Bengal. No Brāhmaṇa priest is required even to-day for their worship²⁸. They are to be worshipped by the priests of the Lower communities called Deyāsis. But for the lack of authentic record it is not possible for us to have a clear idea about these Gods and Goddesses and the system of their worship.

It is already mentioned that the systematic preachings of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism had been started in Bengal since the Gupta period. The people who had been converted into Hinduism began to worship the Vedic deities like Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Kārtikeya²⁹, Brahmā and others. They also began to worship Śakti in the later Gupta period³⁰. They employed Brāhmaṇa priests to perform the religious rites and ceremonies. We have also mentioned that at that time there were no dearth of Brāhmaṇas, well versed in the Vedas. The Brāhmaṇa priests strictly followed the instructions of the Vedas to perform the ceremonials. But inspite of the conversion a large section of people in Bengal did not give up their old faiths and beliefs. To make adjustment between the old faith and neo-Hinduism, the liberal Hindu School

of Bengal began to give new interpretations of the old deities of the native tribes. The gradual understanding between the native school and neo-Hinduism of Bengal helped to build a strong ground for Hinduism in Bengal in later times, though it required a long time to give definite shape to it.

We have already told that most of the socio-religious ceremonies and *Vratas* of Bengal had some connection with agriculture. A number of *Vratas* and ceremonies had been observed during the time of sowing seeds. Prayers were made for good crops through these *Vratas*. (The harvesting season of Bengal had also been observed by these *Vratas* and ceremonies of ancient Bengal). The Buddhist and Jains of Bengal had to observe the rites and ceremonies according to their customs and instructions. It can be presumed that the Mahāyāna Buddhism for its more liberal policy and outlook could capture the minds of the people more than Hīnayāna School³¹. So the rites and practices of the Mahāyāna School were more popular than Hīnayāna school to the Buddhists of Bengal. We are not sure how far the Tantric school had gained its ground in Bengal in the Pre-Pāla-period.

With the introduction of the rites and ceremonies of the Vedic Schools, the people of the land came into closer contact with those of the other parts of India. It helped the land to set up a socio-religious relation with the greater Indian society. But with the introduction of the rites and ceremonies of the Aryan society, the people of the land had to lose their former independence in their socio-religious life. A series of injunctions and prohibitions had been imposed on the people who came under the shade of Hinduism.

References :

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2. *The Vedic Age* (edited by Majumdar R.C. and others, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, pp. 189-90.)
3. Quoted from *H B A*, p. 23.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-42.
5. *B.I.*, Vol. II, p. 601.
6. Basu Gopendra Krishna, *Bāṅglar Loukik Devatā*, p. 1,5,138.
7. *H A B*, p. 413.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 8A. Basu, Gopendra Krishna: *Bāṅglar Loukik Devatā*, p. 186.
- 8B. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 8C. *B. I.*, p. 621 .
- 8D. Quoted from *B I*, p. 641 .
9. Chavannes: *Religious Eminentes*, p. 128.
10. *B J.*, Vol. II, p.
11. Basak, R.G., Plate No. 2, *Damadorpur Copper Plate Inscription*, p. 114.
- 11A. *B I* Vol. II, p. 611 .
12. *Ibid.*, p. 611.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 611.
14. Gopendra Krishna Basu: *Bāṅglar Loukik Devata*, p. 185.
15. Vātsyāyan: *Kāmsutra* p, 56, Beng. trans by Ghosh, Sudhansu Ranjan: Mausami Prakashan, Calcutta.
16. *B I*, Vol. II, p. 617.
17. Vātsyāyan: *Kāmsutra*, p. 118.
18. *B I*, Vol. II, pp. 618-19.
19. Vātsyāyan: *Kāmsutra*, 56, Beng. trans by Ghosh, Sudhansu Ranjan.
20. Uñcha, Uñchā pavat tāñhi basai Śavara bali/Morangi piccha parh in Śavari : A Śavari girl lives on a high hill, she wears peacock feathers (Charyāpad; edited by Prof. Ghose and Mukherjee, Canto-2B Śavarapad Rag Baladdi, p. 68).
21. *B I*, Vol. II, p. 622.
22. Quoted from *B I*, p. B22.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 623.
- 23A. *Ibid.*, p. 621.
24. Ghosh, Benoy: *Bāṅglar-Loko-Samaskriti-Ō Samājtattaya*, p. 147.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
26. Basu, Gopendra Krishna: *Bāṅglar Loukik Devatā*; p. 34.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
29. The existence of the temple of Kartikeya at Pundravardhana is mentioned in the works of Kalhaṇa, IV, p. 422 in the 8th centur AS.
30. According to Devi Purāna composed about the end of the 7th century A.D. or the beginning of the 8th century A.D. The Devi was worshipped in different names in different places of Rāḍha Varendra, Kāmrupa and Bhattadesa, pp, 39, 14-15, 42-29.
31. Dasgupta, Shashi Bhushan : *Obscure Religious Cults*, p. 17.

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMIC LIFE OF ANCIENT BENGAL

From the works of the writers of ancient India like Kauṭilya, Nāgasen, Saṇḍhyākara Nandi and others and from the accounts of Foreign travellers like Ptolemy, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-Tsing, Sen-Chi and others we can have some idea about the economic life of the people of ancient Bengal. Besides these works we can get some idea about the economic condition of Bengal from the works of '*Periplus*', the *Prākṛita Piṅgala*, the *Charyā Songs* and the *Lekhamālās*. These works throw much light on the economic activities of the people of ancient Bengal.

Agriculture: Much before the advent of the Aryans, the people of Bengal had been acquainted with agriculture. The art of tilling lands and irrigation for the purpose of agriculture were known to them. They were to produce different types of crops in their lands. Agriculture had become the chief occupation of the people from the second or third century B.C.¹.

From the different inscriptions of Bengal we come to know about the process of selling and donation of lands. (They will be discussed in detail in another chapter of this topic).

The farmers are referred to by these inscriptions as *Kshetra-Karaṇas*, *Karshakaṇas*, *Kṛishikāṇas* etc. From these inscriptions we come to know that with the progress of agriculture the farmers had occupied an important position in the Society. The Government officials, dealing with the lands, were to give information to the farmers during the time of donation or transfer of lands. We, also, come to know the increasing demand of the people for fertile lands for the purpose of agriculture.

The contemporary records also narrate the technical skills of the farmers. The popular sayings of '*Dākā*' and '*Khanā*' were

introduced among the farmers and they are to indicate the knowledge of materiology of the farmers of Bengal^{1A}.

The causes of the development of agriculture were not far to seek. The alluvial soil, heavy rainfall, the sufficient heat of the sun and diligence as well as the inventive power of the farmers of Bengal helped Bengal to develop her agriculture. A large number of people had been engaged in agriculture. Almost every family, living in villages had some lands and had to produce some food crops for themselves.

From the descriptions of Hiuen Tsang we come to know that Kajaṅgala (comprising eastern Bihar and a part of Bengal) was famous for her agricultural products². Pūṇḍravardhana was the most popular place where agriculture was in a flourishing condition. Hiuen Tsang mentions the abundance of different types of crops of Pūṇḍravardhana³. He praises the Jack-fruits of Pūṇḍravardhana⁴. From him we come to know that the people of Pūṇḍravardhana and Tāmralipta were rich and their prosperity were due to their extensive farming and trade and commerce with other lands⁵.

Like to-day rice was the principal food crop of Bengal. From the contemporary works we learn about the extensive cultivation of rice in different parts of Bengal. Besides rice, some other food-grains and fruits which are familiar in Bengal to-day were also grown.

From "*Raghuvaṁśa*" of Kālidāsa, *Rāmacharita* of Sandhāya Kar Nandi we come to know that different types of rice were grown in Bengal. Though irrigation was known to the farmers, they were to depend mainly on the rainfall and prayers were made to God for sufficient rainfall. The folk-songs and tales were to narrate the prayer of the people. 'Śāli' and 'Āman' rice were very favourite to the farmers of Bengal. Kālidāsa in his works, '*Raghuvaṁśa*'⁶ mentions the cultivation of Śālidhāna in Bengal. Sandhāya Kar Nandi in his works mentions the process of husking rice⁷. Different poets of ancient and mediaeval Bengal describe the attention of the farmers of Bengal for Śāli rice (dhana). From the works of Kālidāsa we come to know that the wives of the

farmers of Bengal were to guard the paddy-field of Śāli rice by squatting under the shade of sugar cane at night. From this work we also come to know the process of reaping and threshing of rice which appears. to have been similiar to those prevailing at present.

Besides rice, the farmers of ancient Bengal were to cultivate different type of crops like sugar cane, mustards, cotton, jute, malabathrum, spikenard, betal-leaf (or betel.vines) etc. From epigraphic records it also appears that betel-nut, palm and cocoanut were extensively grown up and down the land⁸.

From the works of different foreign writers like Aelian, Lucan and others (and also-from the contemporary literature) we come to know about the extensive cultivation of sugar cane. Sandhayā Kar Nandi in his works mentions the extensive cultivation of sugar cane in the Northern Bengal⁹. He says that the sugar cane plants of Varendrabhūmi makes the land more beautiful. The extensive cultivation of different types of sugar cane in Northern Bengale is also mentioned by different writers of the Sanskrit literature of ancient India and "most commentators of Sanskrit lexicons agree that it (Puṇḍravardhana) was so named because it (the sugar cane is called Pauṇḍraka in Sanskrit) was grown in Paundra Country"¹⁰. Besides Puṇḍravardhana the cultivation of sugarcane in other parts of Bengal is also mentioned by the writers of ancient India. In this connection we can remind the philological theory about the name of Gauḍa. The theory states that Gauḍa Deśha had derived its name from Guṛa, prepared from sugarcane. We do not know how far the theory is true but it suggests that Gauḍa was famous for the cultivation of sugarcane from the very early time and the extensive cultivation of sugarcane in the land might encourage the people to name the land after the product of sugarcane (Guṛa).

An extensive cultivation of mustard in different parts of Bengal for the purpose of preparing edible oil was mentioned in different copper plate Inscriptions. The term 'Sarshap-Yāṇaka' has been found in *Vappāghoshavaṭa inscriptions* of Jayanāga¹¹. The term probably suggests the road beside the mustard fields. It also

indicated the extensive Cultivation of mustards. Hiuen Tsang in his works mentions a lot of agricultural products and fruits of Bengal¹².

From the inscriptions of Bengal from the 5th century A.D. to the 7th century A.D. we can learn about the different agricultural products of Bengal. The inscriptions of the Pala period also help us to have a clear idea about it. From the writings of 'Periplus' we come to know that Ilāchi (Cardamom), Pepper, malabathrum, spikenard etc. have been exported to the Roman empire where a pound of pepper was sold at 15 gold dināras¹³.

The extensive cultivation of cotton can be found in the old literatures of Bengal. The *Charyā songs* mention the *Kārpas* tree¹⁴. The existence of *Kārpas* (cotton plant) trees in the gardens adjacent to the houses of the common people and the fine clothes of Bengal suggest the thorough cultivation of cotton in Bengal.

The two other crops, which have had extensive cultivation in Bengal were Betel nut, Palms and cocoanut trees. Cocoanuts were available in the Padmā-Gangā-Bhāghirathī-Karatoā regions and the coastal lands of Bengal.

From the writings of Hiuen Tsang, Idrā Copper Plate Inscription¹⁵ and other sources it appears that Mango, Jack-fruit (Paṇasa), Pomegranate, Plantain, Madhuka, Citron, Figs, Mahuā etc. were very popular in Bengal. The Govindapur Plate (c.6) refers to an 'orchard' of pomigranates (Dalimva Kshetra)¹⁶. The trees of these fruits were planted in different parts of Bengal. The inscriptions of ancient Bengal also throw much light on the food-habits of the people and from them we come to know about the availability of date - palms, pomegranate etc. Banana was a very popular food in Bengal and it had a thorough cultivation in different parts of Bengal.

Besides, these, a number of vegetables like brinjals, pomkins, gourd, chilli etc. were grown in Bengal. People preferred fish and vegetables when they used to take their meals.

A vast part of Bengal had been covered with bamboo trees and forests. Bamboo trees and the woods of the forests were a great source of earning for the people of Bengal. They were used

for the purpose of construction of houses and as fuels.

Salt had been produced in Bengal. A section of people of the coastal regions earned their livelihood by producing salt from the sea-water. From the epigraphic records we come to know the process of producing salt.

Bengal was famous for her ghee and butter. A section of people especially the milkmen were engaged in producing ghee and butter.

Mineral Wealths : Bengal was rich in her mineral wealth. Iron, Copper, diamonds and pearls were found in Bengal, the people of Bengal were acquainted with the use of articles made of irons. The lower portion of the ploughs and some utensils necessary for household purposes were made of Iron. The iron mines were situated in the Janglekhand (forest part) of the Rāḍhā country¹⁸.

Copper was also found in Bengal. It was possibly found along the bank of the Suvarṇarekhā river. The name Tāmralipta probably bears reminiscence of its having been associated with copper in the old days¹⁹. In this connection it can be reminded here that India's one of the largest copper and iron belts of to-day are found in that part of the country which at one time formed a part of the Rāḍhā country.

From the works of *Arthaśāstra* it appears that silver was found in ancient Bengal, though it was not of high quality. The author of *Arthaśāstra* named it *Gauḍika*²⁰ and it looked like Agaruflovers (the flowers of the fragrant tree). It was white.

From *Arthaśāstra* we come to know that gold dust in small quantities were collected from some of the river-beds like Suvarṇarekhā in Bengal. The names of the localities like Sonargāon, Suvarṇabithi, Sonarpur etc. indicated the popularity of gold to the people of Bengal.

From the works of Kauṭilya we also come to know that diamonds and pearls were available in Bengal. Kauṭilya in his works mentions the names of Paunḍraka and Tripur (Tripura) where diamonds were available²¹. Abul Fazal, in his works *Ain-I-Akbari*, mentions that during the reign of Akbar the diamond

mine existed at Gaḍmandaran (Arambag sub-division in the Hooghly district of West Bengal) Possibly it was an old mine, various Sanskrit works like Ratna-Parikshā. Vṛhatsamhitā etc. refer to the diamond mines of Puṇḍra and Vaṅga.

We learn from the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* that pearls were available in Bengal. The *Periplus* also speaks of the Gāṅgeya-pearls of Bengal²². Besides *Periplus*, the Mahābhārata (Sabhā Parva)²³ and the other Sanskrit work 'Ratna Parikshā' also mention the pearls of the coastal regions of the east.

Wild Animals of Bengal: A large number of wild beasts were found in Bengal. Among them there was a great demand for elephants. Kauṭilya mentions the demands of the elephants of Bengal and Kāmarūpa. A large number of elephants were caught every year. They were later trained for different purposes. A subject named Hasti Āurveda (Medical science for elephants) had been developed in Bengal. From the literatures of ancient Bengal we come to know that the Veterinary surgeons of Bengal had shown great proficiency in this subject. Megasthenes and Hiuen Tsang also mention the abundance of elephants in Bengal and Kāmrūpa in their works²⁴.

From the different copper plate inscriptions of the 7th century A.D. we get informations about the wild animals of Bengal. They mention deer, hog, tiger, elephants, snakes and some other animals. The *Pāṇḍpur Plates* bear the figures of animallike cow, monkey, horse, camels etc. These animals like cow, horse, camels etc were used in different purposes. There is no doubt that horses and camels were imported from outside for the purposes of war and trade and commerce.

The old inscriptions do not speak much of birds, though duck, hens, pigeons, crow, cuckoo, dove etc. were very familiar in Bengal and a section of people used to earn their livelihood through hunting and selling of the birds.

Industry and Industrial Products of Bengal:

From the very ancient times Bengal was famous for her industry and industrial products. From the works of Kauṭilya,

Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang we know about the industry and industrial products of Bengal. The author of the *Periplus* also throws much light on this subject.

Textile Industry : Bengal had earned much fame for her textile industry. The '*Periplus*' praises the fine muslins of Bengal. The work says that the Muslins of the finest sorts were exported from Bengal. Besides muslin, Bengal was famous for her cotton clothes. Kauṭilya in his works praises the fine clothes of Bengal like Dukula. He classifies it into three types viz, Vaṅgaka, Pauṇḍraka and Sauvarṇakuṇḍaka²⁶. He praises the Vaṅgaka and Pauṇḍraka which were manufactured in eastern and Northern Bengal respectively. Vaṅgaka was white and soft fabric while Pauṇḍraka was black and as soft as the surface of a gem. Besides these Kauṭilya also mentions three other types of clothes— named Kshauma, Patrana and Kārpāsika.

Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that Kshauma was probably linen of coarse quality and Patrana was also silk of less inferior quality²⁷. According to Kauṭilya naga tree, likucha, vakula and vata were the source of the fibres from which these clothes were made²⁸.

Kārpāsika was made of cotton and it had earned much fame even outside Bengal. The weavers of Bengal were expert in weaving fine cotton clothes.

Besides cotton clothes, the weavers were to produce clothes from the threads of jute. These clothes were called Paṭṭa- bastras. They were generally worn for performing the sacred rites.

From the writings of the poets of Bengal it is known that the poor women of the Brāhmiṇ families used to earn their livelihood by spinning threads.

Sugar and Molasses: It is already noted that Bengal was famous for the cultivation of sugarcane. Sugar and molasses were produced from sugarcane. Here we can remind the philological theory that Gauḍa Desa had derived its name from Gura (molasses). It is also said by some scholars that a kind of sugarcane was called Pauṇḍraka and it was so named because it was growing in the Pauṇḍra country²⁹. Śuśruta, a great physician of

ancient India, mentions that a large quantity of Sugar can be produced from Paunḍraka cane³⁰. These things also suggest that Bengal from a very ancient time was famous for her sugar and molasses. Thus, it was not improbable that a large number of people had been engaged in this industry and Bengal earned much wealth from outside from these products.

Other Industries: Bengal was also famous from the ancient times for her arts and crafts and got admiration from other parts of India. The skills of the artists and labourers of Bengal can be found in the numerous finds of pottery of various sizes and designs, terracotta plaques with beautiful figures engraved thereon, metal works of various kinds and the weapons of war like sword. The metal images and the weapons made of bronze and octo-alloy were to show the craftsmanship of the artists of Bengal.

The artists and artisans of Bengal also earned much fame for their skill in jewellery. The literary works and Epigraphic records describe the fashion of the rich section to use gold and silver dishes and ornaments made of diamonds, pearls and other precious stones. Inscription No. C2 mentions 'flowers made of precious stones, necklaces, ear-rings, anklets garlands and golden bracelets, worn by the wives of kings, servants and also by the temple girls³¹. A number of people were engaged in the industry and the industry had been flourished mainly in the cities of Bengal.

From the literatures and epigraphic records we come to know that a number of industries had flourished in Bengal. Among these industries, the ship-building industry deserves special mention. The land was full of rivers and canals and the merchants of Bengal preferred river-routes to carry their merchandise, though they did not avoid the land-routes altogether. The dependance on boats and ships for trade and commerce as well as for communication naturally helped to flourish the ship building industry of Bengal.

Samatāṭa and Gauḍa were famous for their ship building industry. The *Haraha Inscription* of Īśwānvarman describes the

people of Gauḍa as 'Samudrāśrayan'³². Kālidasa in his works *Raghuvamśa*³³, describes the inhabitants of Bengāl as 'Nau Sādhanaadyatān'. The terms like *Nau bāt*, *Nau bitān*, *Nau Daṇḍak*, etc. connected with boats and harbours, can be found in different inscriptions of Bengal. These terms also indicate the development of the harbours and the ship building industry of Bengal. It may be presumed that the ship building industry had been developed mainly in the sea-port towns and cities, situated on the bank of rivers.

The swords manufactured in Bengal had a great fame. Bengal exported swords even outside India. The *Agni-Purāṇa* says that the swords were characterised by both keenness of edge and the power of standing blows³⁴.

A host of other minor industries had been developed in Bengal. The potters, dyers, leather-workers, carpenters, confectioners, garland makers, basket makers, black-smiths, stone-cutters of ordinary types were to supply the necessary commodities of the daily life. The paintings of Pāhāḍpur, Sāvār and Mahāsthān display the life and activities of the skilled labourers as well as the common people of Bengal.

Economic Life of the People :

1) Village Life: From the works of Kauṭilya; the inscriptions of Bengal of the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. and the writings of the foreign travellers we can have a fair idea about the life of the common people of Bengal.

From these accounts it appears that the villagers lived a simple and honest life. They were self-dependent and did not import goods from outside. Agriculture played a very important role in their economic life. The largest section of the people were to depend on agriculture. Most of the families possessed some lands for the purpose of agriculture.

From different inscriptions of the period it appears that the villages generally consisted of certain well defined parts, viz, village settlement or habitat (*vāstu*), arable land (*Kṣhetra*) and natural meadow-land (*go-chāraṇa*) which provided pasture for live-stock³⁵. Besides these lands, most of the villages contained

pits, canals, tanks, reservoirs, barren tracks and cattle tracks. From the records of the Gupta and the Post-Gupta periods we come to know about the system of distribution of lands. The government had reserved the right to the unappropriated waste to such an extent as to deny even the possessors the right of alienation of their holdings³⁶. The ever increasing demands of lands suggest the growing influences of agriculture on the life of the common people of Bengal. The existence of Pasture lands indicates that some people earned their livelihood by the tending of cattle.

A section of people was engaged in trade and commerce. The villages, generally situated on the bank of the rivers or roads, had got some special facilities to develop their trade and commerce-with other parts of the land.

It is already noted that cottage and small scale industries had been flourished in Bengal. Bengal earned valuable foreign exchange, exporting her precious muslins and clothes of quality. Besides cotton textile industry, Bengal was famous for her sugar and molasses. She had a wide spread fame for her arts and crafts undoubtedly, a large section of people were engaged in these industries. It is already noted that some people maintained their families by accepting the profession of hunters, fishermen etc. The paintings of Pāhāḍpur depict the pictures on the life of the common people. These pictures show the selling of fishes by the fisher-women, the hunting of animals by the nishādas etc., through these pictures we can get some informations about the economic activities of the common people of Bengal.

Though the landholders section passed their days rather comfortably, the poor section, specially the untouchable section, had to suffer much from poverty and hunger. From the old literatures we learn that the people lived in old and ruined huts, the children had no enough food. They became thin. The people had to face hunger for want of food "Hāḍita Bhāt nāi, Nitya Upabāsa"³⁷, there were no rice in the cooking pot and the starvation was regular. Their sufferings knew no bounds when natural calamities like famine, flood or earthquakes etc. took place.

Since the time of the Guptas (from the time of planned Aryanisation of Bengal) feudalism had been growing its strength gradually. The rulers had become the actual owner of the lands. The people were to purchase lands from the government officials. They, even, during the time of transfer of lands, were to take the permission of the government officials. The government officials were the patrons of the Brāhmins, who received lands as donations from the government officials. They also enjoyed some extra privileges. The pattaulis of the Gupta period like *Dāmadorpur Pattaulis*, *Gunaigārh Pattaulis*, and the pattaulis of the post-Gupta period like *Āshrafpur Pattaulis* of Devakhaḍga, *Nidhanpur Pattaulis* of Bhāskarvarmana throw much light on this subject. The growing influences of Feudalism and caste distinction by the Gupta and Post-Gupta rulers brought a great change in the economic life of the people of Bengal. It had a great effect on the rural economy of Bengal. It made the upper castes like Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas the privileged class while it deprived other castes of their former economic privileges to a great extent.

2) Urban Life : The importance of the urban life in the socio-economic field in ancient Bengal cannot be neglected. Dr. R.C. Majumdar rightly thinks that inspite of un-doubted bias of emphasis on rural life, town also formed an important feature in the economic life of ancient Bengal³⁸. The ancient towns and cities of Bengal were the centres of trade and commerce and brought much prosperity for the people of Bengal. Though some of the towns were established for political or administrative purposes, they soon grew up as important centres of trade and commerce. Most of the towns of ancient Bengal - like Tāmralipta, Koṭivarsha, Puṇḍravardhana, Gaṅgābandar, Karnaśuvarṇa, Nāvyakāsikā had a trade link with the other cities of Northern India. Tāmralipta was the largest sea-port town of eastern India and had a contact with the Far East and Roman Empire from the very ancient time. We can't deny that even the economic prosperity of the villages were to depend to a great extent, on the development of trade and commerce of cities.

The flourishing trade and commerce of these cities helped

to grow a rich merchant class. They controlled the economic life of the cities. They might have exercised some influences in the administration of the cities.

From the contemporary literatures we come to know that the rich merchant class lived an extravagant life. From the works of Vātsyāna we learn that well-to-do section of the cities had some vices and cared little for the strict code of morality. But inspite of their corruptions they were the patrons of art and literature. Most of the cities became the centres of learning. Fa-Hien had collected valuable Buddhist texts from Tāmralipta. Hiuen Tsang describes the *Vihāras* of the principal cities which cultivated different branches of knowledge and science.

From the literary and epigraphic sources it is clear to us that while the rural population was mainly dependent on agriculture, the urban people, though did not completely made themselves divorce from agriculture, were engaged in a number of professions. Besides trade and commerce, a section of people were engaged in small scale industries and cottage industries. A number of small scale industries sprang up in these cities. A section of people served in the administration while some people were to join the judicial and the military service.

But after the fall of the Roman Empire an economic slump had appeared in the business world. India could not avoid the situation completely: The trade and commerce of eastern India (as well as Bengal) had been affected much by it. Bengal had to observe the fall of her trade and commerce from the 7th century A.D. It brought ruin to the prosperity of the old cities and affected the economic activities of the life of the people of Bengal to a great extent. The lack of strong government after Śaśānka proved to be disastrous. It disturbed the economic balance of the country and helped to strengthen the root of Feudalism. The rich section preferred to invest money on land instead of business. The Pāla rulers could not revive the former prosperity of trade and commerce. With the fall of trade and commerce the old cities and towns of Bengal were to observe their gradual deterioration.

Trade and Commerce of Ancient Bengal :

In the previous chapters we have already described the features of the trade and commerce of ancient Bengal. In this chapter some lights will be thrown about the characteristics and trends of the trade and commerce of ancient Bengal.

For this topic we can depend on the works of Kauṭilya, Nāgasena Ptolemy, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-Tsing, Sheng-Chi and others. The *Periplus* and the inscriptions of ancient Bengal are very helpful to the students of history.

From the very ancient times Bengal was famous for her products, and it encouraged the traders of the other parts of India to visit the land. Though the Aryan society of Northern India, at first, did not prefer to set up a cultural link with Bengal and imposed some restrictions on the people of their community to visit the land, the Aryan society could not achieve much success. The traders in spite of the restrictions, visited the land for the purpose of trade and commerce.

The flourishing trade and commerce of ancient Bengal brought much prosperity to the land. The royal treasury also got the benefits of trade and commerce. 'There are references to officials for collecting tolls (*Śaulkika*) and supervisors of marts and markets ' (*haṭṭapati*)⁴⁰. We have the names of a number of towns which had flourished for trade and commerce. Among these towns we must have to mention the names of Tāmralipta, Koṭivarsha, Puṇḍravardhana, Kaṇṇasuvārṇa, Gaṅgābandar, Nāvyaṅgāśikā, Pañchanagarī, Paṭṭikera and others. Besides these towns a large number of villages became the centre of trade and business. To supervise the village markets, the supervisors of markets were appointed by the kings and local rulers.

From the works of Hiuen Tsang we learn that there were land routes, connecting different parts of Bengal⁴¹. He went to Kāmārūpa from Puṇḍravardhana, The distance between these two places were about 900 Li. He noticed a number of traders, walking with their merchandise through the high ways, when he had been coming to Kaṇṇasuvārṇa from Tāmralipta. The use of bullock-carts for sending merchandise was not very uncommon.

But the rivers and canals of Bengal were preferred by the merchants to send their commodities (through boats and ships). They could send their goods in large quantity through the boats and ships.) The commodities were to be despatched to the ports and harbours for shipment when they were sent by boats for the purpose of exports. The merchants some times hired men to protect their merchandise from the hands of bandits.

Strabo, the great Greek Geographer, wrote his famous works, 'Geography' between A.D. 17 and 23. He mentions the ascent of vessels from the sea by the Ganges to Palibothra⁴². His information is probably derived from the works of Megasthenes. From 'Periplus' we come to know that Bengal maintained an active over-sea trade with South India and Deccan in the first century A.D. He gives a description of his journey. A part of his journey can be quoted here. "After these, the course turns towards the east again and sailing with the ocean to the right and the shore remaining beyond the left, the Ganges came in to view, and near it the very last land towards the east, chryse, there is river near it called the Ganges"⁴³. The description of the *Periplus* clearly reveals the visit of the traders from foreign lands for the purpose of trade and commerce. The preference of water routes by the traders of Bengal undoubtedly helped to develop the ship-building industry of Bengal. A number of terms connected with boats and harbours had been introduced in the native language of Bengal. Among these terms we can mention the terms like 'Nau-bāt', Nauyogkhāta⁴⁴, Nābat-Kśheni', 'Nau-daṇḍak', 'Nau-bitān' etc. 'Nabāt-ksheni' possibly indicated the ship-building harbours⁴⁵, while Nau-daṇḍak' meant the jetty where boats and ships could be anchored⁴⁶. The use of water routes by the traders also helped the sailors to have a skill in the art of navigation. The tales of Mahānāvik (great sailor) Budhagupta of 'Raktamrittikā also remind us of the proficiency of the sailors of Bengal⁴⁷.

From the writings of Ptolemy, Plinny and others we learn that the Indian traders as well as the traders of Bengal and manufacturers had to export different type of articles to the Roman Empire. They used to send Muslin and fine cotton clothes.

Besides clothes they exported cardamoms, cloves, pepper, betel-nut, malabathrum, spikenard and other agricultural products. From Pliny we come to know that Pepper had a great demand in the Roman Empire where a pound of Pepper was sold at 15 gold *dīnāras*⁴⁸. From his works we learn that Indian traders had to earn a lakh of rupees every year in exchange of their cotton clothes. Bengal imported silk and silk yarn from China and some other commodities from South East of Asia. She had to export rice in different coastal regions of India and foreign lands^{48A}. A section of traders had to export horses of central Asia to South East of Asia through the ports of Bengal^{48B}.

The foreign trade of Bengal helped her to earn valuable gold and silver coins. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that the Indian traders accepted foreign gold coins in exchange of their commodities⁴⁹. These gold coins were called *dīnarius* (or *Dīnāra*) and the silver coins were called *drachm* (or *Drahma*). This favourable balance of trade helped them to have enough gold coins in their hand. They used these gold coins even as the medium of exchange in their internal trade. From the Pattaulis of the 5th century to 8th century A.D. we come to know that the value of the land was fixed in gold *dīnārs*⁵⁰ But in later time it was fixed in silver coins. The gradual deterioration of trade and commerce from the 7th century A.D. forced the people to sell their lands for silver coins in lieu of gold.

Though in most cases the traders insisted on the individual or family enterprises, The guild system was not unknown to Bengal. From some Inscriptions of Northern Bengal ranging between A.D. 443-44 and 533-54 we come to know about the existence of guilds⁵¹. The heads of the guilds enjoyed a high status in the society. They are found to be associated with the government officials in the management of crown lands⁵².

Like other parts of India the traders of Bengal had to face the attack of the bandits and robbers. We have already noted in previous chapters that the trader employed men to protect their commodities from the hands of thieves and robbers. Piracy was not unknown to them. According to a story referred to by

Daśakumāracharita, the prince of Tāmralipta committed piracy near the port of Tāmralipta and once with a fleet of large and small boats attacked a Greek vessel. This type of piracy possibly were not unknown in other ports of Bengal⁵³.

From the contemporary sources it is evident that up to the 7th or beginning of the 8th century A.D. Bengal derived much wealth from her trade and commerce. With the flourishing trade and commerce the merchants of Bengal acquired huge wealth and it placed them in a high position in the society. From the contemporary inscriptions we come to know that among the first five government officials of the rulers, viz, *Vishyapati*, *Prathama Kāyastha*, *Nagarā Śreṣṭhī*, *Prathama Sārthavāha* and *Prathama Kulika*, the third, fourth and fifth looked after the interest of the traders. The *Nagara Śreṣṭhī* and *Prathama Sārthavāha* represented the interest of the guilds while the *Prathama Kulika* represented the interest of the artisan class. The *Prathama Kulika* was the head of their guilds. The traders and merchant of Bengal had exercised much influence even in the field of administration⁵⁴.

We have already noted that a change had been noticed from the last half of the 7th century A.D. or from the beginning of the 8th century A.D. The fall of the Roman Empire had a great effect in the business world. It also affected the trade and commerce of India. The merchants of India had lost their market in Europe. They could not find markets else-where to sell their products. The loss of the businessmen of Bengal was irreparable. They faced the *Mātsyānnaya* (a great confusion) after the death of Śaśāṅka. The political unrest, the absence of law and order ruined the economic prosperity of Bengal and the prospect of trade and commerce. The people engaged in trade and commerce were forced to depend on lands more and more. It strengthened the hands of feudalism which was in progress. The fall of trade and commerce also affected the progress of the land in the field of culture. It made the people of Bengal introspective. The attempts of the Pāla rulers to revive the prosperity of trade and commerce could not achieve much success. Important Ports and towns of Bengal had to face decline from thence.

Most of the towns which grew up in ancient times were connected with trade-routes by land and water and a few ports like Tāmralipta, which had a good harbour, encouraged the Indian as well as foreign merchants to set up a direct business line with the people of Bengal. We have also the names of a number of towns that were originally established for the purpose of administration (such as Kārṇasuvārṇa, Puṇḍravardhana etc), and gradually developed as important centres of trade and commerce for the facilities of communication.

Among the important ports and towns of Bengal of that period we must have to mention the names of Tāmralipta, Gaṅgābandar, Saptagrāmā Paloura, Puṇḍravardhana, Kārṇasuvārṇa, Daṇḍabhukti, Koṭivarsha, Nāvyaśālikā, Pañchanagarī, Paṭṭikera, Suvarṇagrāma Pushakarana etc.

In this chapter some descriptions of the important ports and towns of Bengal are given.

Tāmralipta: Dr. P. C. Dasgupta, a famous archaeologist, rightly observes 'with its history glowing in India and foreign accounts dating from a remote antiquity Tāmralipta in Bengal will ever remain as a city to remember'⁵⁵.

The remarks of Dr. Dasgupta about the Port of Tāmralipta is very correct. It had become a famous port of eastern India from the very early times. Varāhamihira describes the place as Tāmraliptaka while the Ceylonese works Mahāvamsa as Tamolitti, Ptolemy refers to it as Tamalites and Pliny as Taluctae. Besides these there are a number of synonyms for Tāmralipta, viz, Tamolitti, Tamālipti, Tamālikā, Tāmalipta, Tāmraliptikā, Velakula, Vishnugriha, Tamālini etc.⁵⁶.

In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*⁵⁷, Tāmralipta was placed near the eastern sea and in the *Daśhakumara Charita* it is described as a centre of trade and commerce and of maritime activities, close to the sea, not far from the Ganges; the work also refers to the coming of a yavana vessel to the harbour of Tāmralipta⁵⁸. This place is now identified with present Tamluk town on the right bank of the Rupnārāyan in the East Midnapore district.

According to the Mahābhārata, a warrior prince named

Tāmra-dhvaja offered battle to the Pāṇḍavas by seizing their horse of Aśvamedha⁵⁹. The city was named after Tāmradhvaja. During the time of the Mauryas Tāmralipta was a part of the Magadhan empire. 'The *Mahāvamsa*' describes the visit of Tāmralipta by Ashoka on the occasion of the voyage of Mahendra and Saṅghamitrā with the holy branch of the Bodhi tree at the time of the rule of the pious ruler Devānāmpiya Tissa⁶⁰. The '*Dasha Kumāra Charita*' of Dandin refers to the coming of a yavana vessel to the port of Tāmralipta. Pliny and Ptolemy refer to this port as Taluctae and Tāmalities⁶¹. In the 5th century A.D. Fa-Hien set sail for China from this port. The port existed when Hiuen Tsang visited India. He noticed a *stupa* built by Ashoka⁶². But the act of brigandage by robbers made the way to Tāmralipta unsafe for traders and pedestrians. When I-Tsing set out from Nālandā for Tāmralipta, he was attacked by robbers on his way⁶³. From this port I-Tsing set sail for Śribhoga. From I-Tsing we come to know that Tāmralipta afforded opportunities for fortune hunters. From the *Dudhpāni Inscriptions* of Hazāribāg (in Bihar) we also come to know the story of three brothers, viz, Udayamāna, Sridhan-tamāna and Ajitamāna, who went to Tāmralipta from Ayodhaya and earned a huge amount of wealth by trade and commerce⁶⁴. From this inscription it appears that this port had a wide fame in Northern India and this city was connected with important cities of Northern India by well-planned land and water routes.

The city of Tāmralipta became the centre of Buddhist education. Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsan, I-Tsing mention the fame of Buddhist monasteries of Tāmralipta, Fa-Hien stayed there for two years for the purpose of translating the Buddhist scriptures⁶⁵.

The fate of the famous port was sealed from the 7th century A.D. The process of land formation near the harbour brought the death-knell of the port. By the end of 9th century A.D. the channel on which Tamluk was situated was silted up. Tamluk, however continued to be a centre of trade and commerce until the end of the 16th century.

From the accounts of the Chinese travellers we learn that the port of Tāmralipta had a commercial link with the ports of

Sribhoga (South East of Asia), Ceylon (modern Srilanka), and some other ports of South East of Asia^{65A}. The port maintained a link with the other ports of western India and some ports of Europe. Ptolemy, Pliny and some other writers of Europe and 'The Periplus' mention the port. It maintained a direct contact with Gayā, Pātaliputra and some other important towns of the Magadhan. empire (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) through water routes by the- river Gangā and her tributaries. Through Gayā it maintained a road link with all the important cities of Northern India as far as Taxila by way of which the ancient trade routes were connected with central and western India⁶⁶.

From 'The Periplus of the Erythrean sea' we come to know that through this port the Greek merchants brought malabathrum and Gangetic spikenard and pearls and muslins of the finest sorts⁶⁷ which are called 'Gangetic'. In the previous chapter we have given a list of articles which were to be exported from this port. No other port of Eastern India earned so much fame as was (earned by) Tāmralipta.

Gaṅgābandar : Another important port of ancient Bengal was Gaṅgābandar. The name of the port is mentioned both by the author of the *Periplus* and Ptolemy. According to the *Periplus* it was situated on the bank of the Ganges. But some scholars identify the port with Tamluk as Ptolemy- mentions both Ganga and Tamalities while some other think that it was Suvarṇagrāma or Suvarṇapura (modern Sonār-gāon). But Ptolemy in his works refers to this place as Sonnargoura separately. Dr. B.C. Sen in his works says that it might be that the site of Hooghly (with Saptagrama or Satgaon extending upto Trivani) was the exact place for the port. According to Dr. Sen, Hooghly is situated on the bank of the Ganges. The name Gaṅgābandara might have been derived from the river Gaṅgā. The port was possibly situated on the bank of Gaṅgā (or Bhāghirathī). From the ancient time, Hooghly, with its neighbouring places was a trading centre and was accessible to the larger ships. It was once the capital of Rāḍhā. The sea was much closer to this place in ancient times. So the present Hooghly might be the exact place for the port. But recently

scholars like Bratindra Nath Mukherjee think that Gaṅgā-bandar was situated near Chandra Ketugaḍ of North 24 Parganas^{67A}.

The port began to get importance from the Second Century A.D. Merchants from different parts of India and abroad used to gather there for business purposes. A vast number of articles were imported through this port. Raw-silk, silk-yarn and silk clothes were to be carried down from the city of China. They were to be sent to the different places of Tamil country. Various articles of trade including pearls and muslins of finest quality were to be exported from this place.

Different articles including spices and agricultural products were exported to Europe from Gaṅgāvandara.

From 'The Periplus' we get some valuable informations about the port, "The course turns towards the east again and sailing with the ocean to the right and the shore remaining beyond to the left, the Ganges comes into view, and near it the very last land towards the east chryse. There is a river near it called the Ganges ... on it's bank is a market town which has the same name as the river Ganges"⁶⁸.

The name of the port of Gaṅgāvandara was not mentioned in later times. Possibly it had lost its importance in the Pāla period.

Pāloura : Pāloura was an important port of ancient Bengal. According to Yule it was at Jaleswar, near Contai, in the Midnapore District. St. Martin identifies it with Pollerah, seventeen miles away from Tamluk. Dr. B.C. Sen thinks that the port was situated at Dantan. It acted as a substitute port of Tamluk. Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that the oversea trade from Tamralipta followed different courses. There was a coastal voyage to Paloura from Tāmralipta. It was near modern Chicacole⁶⁹ and then right across the Bay of Bengal to the opposite coast.

NāvyavaKāśhikā: One of the oldest ports of Eastern

Bengal was NāvyavaKāśhikā. From the *Kotālīpaḍā inscription* of the 6th century A.D. we come to know that the port was situated in the Faridpur district of Eastern Bengal (modern Bangladesh)⁷⁰. It was on the bank of a tributary of Padmā. It maintained a commercial relation not only with the other parts

of Bengal, but also with other ports of Eastern India and Arākan. 'It was a rendezvous of merchants and businessmen'⁷¹.

Puṇḍravardhana : *Puṇḍravardhana* was the oldest city in Northern Bengal. The ancient Sanskrit literatures like '*Divyābadāna*, *Rājātaraṅginī*, *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī*, throw light on the city. It was on the bank of Karotoya. *Rāmacharita*⁷² of Sandhya-Kara Nandi gives the location of the city. It was seven miles away from the Bagura town of modern Bangladesh. The present Mahāsthān was known as Puṇḍravardhana Nagara. According to the Buddhist literature Lord Buddha stayed sometime at Puṇḍranagara to preach his doctrine.

The city from the very ancient times became the centre of trade and commerce. According to *Kathāsaritsāgara* Puṇḍravardhana was a great market place and its streets were lined up with shops^{72A}. It had a direct link with the other cities of Northern India through Rājpaths (or public highways). The *Rājātaraṅginī* mentions the wealth of the citizens of Puṇḍravardhana⁷³. The modern excavations throw much light on the vastness of the city. Even in the Pāla period, a large number of rich merchants lived in the city. *Rāmacharita* mentions the town and the rich merchants who lived in the city.

Kaṇḥasuvārṇa: Kaṇḥasuvārṇa, the capital of Śaśāṅka, was the most populated city in eastern India, in the first half of the 7th century A.D. From Hiuen Tsang we come to know that it was situated on the Bhāghirathī and it was a large town. It was not only the capital of Gauḍa, it was also a centre of trade and commerce. The ruins of Kaṇḥasuvārṇa have been discovered at Rājbaridāngā (near the modern Railway Station Chiruti) in the Murshidabad district⁷⁴. It was six miles away from Baharampur, the present head quarters of the Murshidabad district.

The prosperity of the town must have encouraged the merchants of eastern India to set up a trade link with the town through land and water routes. Some of the traders and merchants of Kaṇḥasuvārṇa had earned much fame for their trade and commerce. Among them we can mention the Mahānāvika (great

sailor) Buddhagupta of Kaṇḍasuvārṇa. From a Sanskrit inscription of a Buddhist temple of Malaya we come to know about him. 'The inscription describes him as an inhabitant of Raktamṛttikā, 'Mahānāvika Buddhagupta says Raktamṛttika Bas (or Basya)⁷⁵. Though Professor Kern identifies Raktamṛttikā with the coastal region of Siyam, Professor N.R. Roy does not agree with him. He points out that the inscription is written in Sanskrit and the term *Mahānāvika* is purely Indian in origin. The name 'Buddhagupta' has a special relation with the people of India⁷⁵. So Dr. N.R. Roy expresses his doubt against the views of Prof. Kern. He reminds the descriptions of Hiuen Tsang about Kaṇḍasuvārṇa. Hiuen Tsang says that near the capital there was a famous Buddhist Vihara named Lo-to-mo-chi. The Chinese term Lo-to-mo-chi indicates Raktamṛttikā and therefore Dr. Roy thinks that possibly Buddhagupta was an inhabitant of Raktamṛttikā of Kaṇḍasuvārṇa⁷⁷. (He also reminds that there is another Rāṅgāmati in the Chittagang district of Bangladesh). From Hiuen Tsang we come to know that there was a direct link between Kaṇḍasuvārṇa and Tāmralipta through High ways. Kaṇḍasuvārṇa was about 700 Li from Tāmralipta⁷⁸.

Kaṇḍasuvārṇa played a very important part in the economic life of Bengal in the 7th century A.D.

Kotivarsha: Another important trading centre of Bengal was Kotivarsha. It was situated on the bank of Puṇarbhavā in the Dinajpur district. The Jain text *Prajñāpana* mentions Kotivarsha (or Bangarh) as a city in Rāḍha. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* describes the city as Koṭivarshanagaram. From Jaina Kalpasūtra we come to know that a disciple of Bhadrabāhu (the great preceptor of Chandragupta Maurya) had divided the Jainas of Bengal into four branches viz, Tāmālittya (Tāmralipta), Kodivarsiya (Kotivarsha), Puṇdravardhana and Khha-badiya (of Karvata)⁷⁹. The fame or Kotivarsha spread out far and wide. The town had the same status as Mathurā, Ujjain, Kaṇauj, Kauśāmbī and Prayāga. The prosperity of Koṭivarsha was mainly due to her trade and commerce. Koṭivarsha was a centre of merchants and businessmen like Nāvyaśikā. The city maintained her fame

for a long time. The Muslim historians also mention the name of Koṭivarsha in their works.

Besides these great cities and towns, we have the name of some other towns which also played an important role in the trade and commerce of Bengal.

The Ceylonese chronicles refer to Vaṅganagara and Siṅghapur. Vāṅgapura is not yet identified. Some scholars suggest that Siṅghapur may be identified with Singur in the Serampore Sub-Division of the Hooghly district. The *Gunāigarh grant* of Vainya Gupta of the Gupta dynasty mentions the royal residence of Kripurā and the naval port of Chuṛāmani and Nagaraśrī⁸⁰ We have also the names of some important towns of ancient Bengal like Suvarṇagrām, Jayaskandhābāra⁸¹, Bhuriśreṣṭhika and others which were important trading centres of Bengal. Bhuriśreṣṭhika (situated on the Damodar in the Howrah district) was the residence of the śreṣṭhins (merchants) of Bengal. Besides these there were a number of villages and towns situated on the banks of the rivers or on the roads which played an important part in the economic development of Bengal. Some of the towns and villages had a great reputation for their products. The traders used to collect their goods from different markets and exported them to the different countries of the world.

The trade routes of Bengal :

From the very ancient time the rivers and canals of Bengal were the chief routes of internal and external trade of Bengal. Besides the water routes there were land routes, which connected the different parts of the land. Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, and I-Tsing give some descriptions of these land and water routes in their works. Besides them we have the works like 'The Periplus', *The Jātaka Stories*, *The Milinda Pañha*, *The Daśha Kumāra Charita*, *The Kathā-Sarit Sāgara*, Ptolemy's 'Geography' and others which throw much light on the subject.

Water Routes: From the works of the writers we come to know that the facilities of transport afforded by the river system encouraged the traders and merchants of Bengal to send their

articles through water routes. Most of the towns and trading centres of ancient Bengal were situated either on the bank of the Ganga or on her tributaries. The ports like Saptagrāma, Gaṅgavandara, Karmasuvārṇa etc. were on the bank of the Gaṅgā. Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that 'in early times the port of Tāmralipta was not unlikely situated on the Saraswati, another branch of the Ganges'⁸². Nāvyaśikā was on the bank of a tributary of Padmā. Puṇḍravardhana was on the bank of Karotoyā and Koṭivarsha was on the bank of Puṇaruaba.

The Gaṅgā and her tributaries played a very important role in the trade and commerce of Bengal. We have already told that most of the towns and important cities of Bengal were either on the bank of the Ganges or on her tributaries. The river was the main trade route of Northern and eastern India. The overseas trade of a large part of North India also passed through the great river. We have already noted that the port of Tāmralipta was connected with most of the important cities of Northern India through water routes. It had a direct connection with Champā, Pātaliputra and Gayā. To set up their authority over the Gaṅgā river and to control the maritime activities, Bimbisāra and his son Ajātsatru of the Haryāṅka dynasty of Magadha conquered Aṅga and the northern bank of the Gaṅgā respectively in the 6th century B.C. Ashoka, the greatest emperor of the Maurya dynasty brought a Bodhi plant to Tāmralipta from Buddha Gaya through this route. Strabo in his works 'Geography' mentions "the ascent of vessels from the sea by Ganges to Palibothra"⁸³ Ships plied up between the ports of Bengal and the islands in the Indian Archipelago, Malāya and China through this water route.

From the contemporary evidences we can think that the ships that set sail from Tāmralipta followed different courses. The first was a Voyage along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal right upto Malaya peninsula and from there through the straits of Malaya to the South east of Asia as far as China⁸⁴. The second was a coastal⁸⁵ Voyage to Palourā and from there right across the Bay of Bengal. The third was a voyage from Tāmralipta to

Ceylon and then turning north along the western coast of India or accross the Arabian sea from some point of South India to the ports of Arabia and Eastern Africa⁸⁵.

Land Routes:

For the important overland trade routes from Bengal to the Northern and North eastern regions of India we must have to mention here the two most important routes.

One of these routes connected Bengal with China through Kamārūpa. This route is mentioned by Chang-Kien, the ambassador of China to the Yue-Chi country in 126 B.C. He was astonished to find the Chinese products, viz, silk and bamboo were carrying for Bactria. On enquiry he came to learn that the caravans carried these products of Southern China came to Afghanistan through India. This route possibly existed upto the 9th century A.D. Through these route-besides the products of China, the products of Assam like textile, sandals and agaru also were carried to Bengal and other parts of Northern India⁸⁷.

Another important overland route must have followed the Ganges, following more or less the same track as the present G.T. Road, the extent of which right accross the whole of Northern India upto Pataliputra is referred to by Megasthenes.

From Kathāsaritsāgara we come to know of another overland trade route passing from Puṇḍravardhana to Pāṭaliputra⁸⁸.

The Chinese traveller I-Tsing mentions another- trade route from Tāmralipta to Gayā-when he left the port in 673 A.D. hundres of merchants accompanied him⁸⁹.

Besides these there was an important overland route which passed the Himalayas accross Nepal, Sikim and Chumba Valley to Tibet and China. It was most important highway for the traders and the Buddhist pilgrims of these countries to India. Mālābathrum and other commodities might have been carried through this route and it must have some connection with Bengal. In the later period a large number of horses were imported to Bengal through this route^{89A}.

The development of trade and commerce of Bengal must

have encouraged the traders of the different parts of India to set up a trade—relation with Bengal. To reach the principal trading centres of Bengal they were to follow certain water and land routes. Thus the highways were constructed for the purpose of trade and commerce. But the highways not only served the purpose of the traders, it also helped to set up a cultural link between Bengal and the rest of India.

We have already noted in the previous chapter that a change in the field of trade and commerce of Bengal as well as India had been noticed since the beginning of the 8th century A.D. The fall of the Roman empire affected the foreign trade of India (as well as Bengal). The Hindu rulers of India since the 8th century A.D. were weak and could not afford the effective help to the traders against the powerful enemy. The growing influences of the Arab traders ruined the prospect of trade and commerce of India on the whole. They captured Sind and established their supremacy over the Arabian Sea. The merchants of western India suffered directly but its consequences in Eastern India cannot be ignored. The traders and merchants of Bengal could not achieve much success against the growing maritime activities of the Arab traders. They, accepting the injunction of the *Smṛitikāras* of the Hindu society, were forced to reduce their activity only in internal trade.

Coins of Bengal :

The economic prosperity of a nation can be imagined through the standard of her coins. Generally, the purity of gold and silver coins suggest the prosperity of the nation. Bengal is not an exception. To have a clear idea about the economic condition of Bengal we should have to go through the coins of ancient Bengal.

Coins had been introduced in Bengal much before the first century A.D. In the *Rock Edict of Mahāsthān* we find a coin named Gaṇḍak⁹⁰. But the edict- does not throw much light on the coin and therefore, it is difficult to say if it was made of gold or silver. Some scholars suggest that this edict also mentions a different type of coin named Kākaṇika. But we do not have any idea about

the form, weight etc. of the coin—and its relation with Gaṇḍak. From the *Periplus* we come to know that a gold coin named *Caltis* had been introduced in the Gaṅgāvandara in the First Century A.D.⁹¹. Some scholars think that the coin *caltis* derived its name from the Sanskrit word *Kalit*. Kanak Lal Barua, a scholar of Assam thinks that the coin, *Kaltis* (*caltis*?) was originally used by a section of merchants of Assam who were called *Kalit* ⁹². A type of punchmarked coins made of silver, copper and lead has been found in different parts of 24-parganas, Medinipore, (in West Bengal), Dacca, Mymensingha, Rajshahi and other parts of Bangladesh. These coins indicate the economic relation of Bengal with other parts of India. Because this type of coins have also been found in other parts of India in large quantities. Kushāṇa coins made of gold have also been found in Bengal. Bengal probably was not under the Kushāṇa rule in any time. The Kushāṇa coins, therefore, suggest the trade and cultural relation of Bengal with the Kushāṇa empire. A large number of Gupta coins have been discovered in Bengal.

The Gupta coins are generally made of gold and silver though the Gupta rulers initially copied the coins of the Kushāṇa period, they soon shook off all foreign features and became completely Indianised"⁹³. The king on the obverse of Gupta coins used to wear Indian dress and ornaments instead of the Kushāṇa type of dress and fashions. The commonest type of Gupta gold issues in early times were the 'Archer King' and 'Seated Goddess'. But in the later times Indian Lakshmī seated on a lotus and holding a lotus and noose in her two hands are to be seen on their coins⁹⁴.

The gold and silver coins of Skandagupta used to bear a certain weight. Generally a gold coin of Skandagupta was equivalent to 142 mashas while a silver coin was 36 masha. The weight of the gold coins of the earlier Gupta rulers were much less.

From different inscriptions we come to know that the gold coins of the Gupta period were called *Dīnara* (*Dinarius Aureus*), while the silver coins were called *Rūpaka*. From *Baigṛām Pattaulis*⁹⁵ we learn that a *dīnāra* was equivalent to 16 *Rūpakas*. In the reign

of Kumāra-Gupta-I a gold *dīnāra* had the weight of 117.8 to 127.3 *mashas* while a silver coin weighed 22.8 to 36.2 *mashas*. Considering this Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that the *ratio* of silver coins were heavier than those of gold⁹⁶. He also thinks that the scarcity of silver made it more precious or the intrinsic value of gold *dīnāra* was much lower at that time. The debasement of gold coins raised the value of silver coins.

After the end of the Gupta rule the silver coins almost disappeared from the market, though gold coins were available in the market. But these gold coins were debased and they had gradually lost the purity of metal. Even these debased coins disappeared later on. The deterioration of the standard coins and gradual disappearance of silver and gold coins from the market indicate the decline of foreign trade of Bengal.

There were rulers in Bengal like Samāchārdeva, Śaśāṅka, Jayanāga, Virsenā, in the post Gupta period. They ruled different parts of the land. All these rulers struck gold coins modelled on the commonest type of Gupta gold issues, viz, 'Archer king', 'Seated Goddess'. This type was initially copied by the Guptas from the Kushāṇas. Although the devices on the coins of Śaśāṅka are different, they are connected with the Gupta issues by their fabric and weight standard⁹⁷. But the deterioration of the standard of gold coins can easily be noticed from the 7th century A.D. A number of coins have been discovered in a large quantity from different parts of Eastern Bengal, notably from Sābhār in the Dacca district and Kotalipāda of the Faridpur district of Bangladesh. Only two of the names of the issuers can be read somehow, one as Śrī Sudhanyāditya and the other as Pṛithuvīra or Pṛithuvīraja. Though the devices on the coins of all these rulers are apparently the same, the issues of Pṛithuvīraja are different by their larger and thinner fabric and cruder execution from those of the Sudhanyāditya group of rulers. The homogeneous Sudhanyadity series of coins are to bear the sign of degeneration. Considering this N. K. Bhattasali in his works *Iconography of Buddhist and Brāhmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum* says, 'In the coins found at Sābhār itself we distinguish three or more stages of debasement'⁹⁸. The

different standards show the personal emblems of the rulers, whose names, if any, cannot be identified properly for the barbarous writings on the reverse. The metrology of the gold issues of the post Gupta period throws interesting light on the gradual deterioration of the standard of gold coins. While *Samā-Chāradeva*, Jayanāga and Śaśānka followed the Gupta standard of 80 *ratio* (144 grains), Virasena struck coins on an usually heavy standard. The weight was on an average of 100 *rati* (180 grains) according to Sātamāna weight system. But the average weight of the later Sudhanyāditya type of imitation Gupta coins of Eastern India ranges between 81.7 and 99.2 grains and may represent the 50 *ratti* (90 grain) half-Sātamāna measures”⁹⁹.

Dr. B. Lahiri thinks that the half Sātamāna standard was not unfamiliar in the Gupta period, although very seldom used. For one of the coins of Kācha weighing 87.4 grain was evidently struck on the 90 *rati* half-Sātamāna weight system¹⁰⁰.

We have already pointed out that the gradual disappearance of silver and gold coins from the markets and the deterioration of standard of coins were due to the fall of foreign trade. Bengal, which had once exported her products to the Roman empire and earned much foreign exchange had to face adverse circumstances since the 7th century A.D. Her foreign trade had been affected much after the fall of the Roman empire. The gradual supremacy of the Arab merchants on the Arabian sea and the Indian ocean ruined the prospect of the foreign trade of Bengal. The Mātsyanāya (the anarchy and confusion) period gave a dead blow to her maritime activity. The political restlessness and frequent invasion of neighbours in the Mātsyanāya period discouraged the people to take initiative in trade and commerce. Though after the end of Mātsyanāya period the peace and prosperity restored in Bengal, the people felt little enthusiasm to take the former initiative. The growing influences of feudalism encouraged the people of Bengal to invest money on land. The Pāla rulers introduced silver and copper coins but they could not check the gradual disappearance of gold coins from the markets of Bengal.

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PART II

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND

From the very ancient time agriculture played a very important part in the rural economy of Bengal. Majority of the people in villages were to earn their livelihood through the cultivation of land. Naturally they had a great demand for land. Though we do not have a clear idea about the distribution of land in the pre-Aryan period of Bengal, it can be said that sufficient lands were available and people faced little difficulty to have their needed land for the purpose of settlement and agriculture.

From the time of the Mauryas the people of Bengal came in contact more and more with the Aryan civilisation. The laws and customs of the Aryan people of Northern India made an access in Bengal step by step and after the Gupta conquest they were to make a solid base here. The Government officials followed the instructions of the politicians and Śmṛitikāra of Northern India to govern the land.

To get the needed information about the general rules and regulations of the distribution of lands we can depend on the instructions of Śmṛitikāra and politicians like Kauṭilya of Northern India. Besides their writings we have to depend on the copper Plate Inscriptions (land grants) of the Kings and high officials of Bengal. These Pattaulis are more authentic. They were the order of the kings to their officials. They throw much light on the customs and practices of the distribution of land. From these pattaulis we can have an idea about the system of purchasing land and the system of donation of lands etc. clearly. These Pattaulis throw light on the rapid settlement of the Aryan people in different parts of Bengal. They also mention the time of these land grants. Considering these Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that the Pattaulis are the more reliable source of information for this topic. Though he admits that these Pattaulis do not supply all the needed

informations to the students of history. Sometimes the scholars with the help of supposition are to solve the problem¹.

We have already noted that for the lack of authentic records we do not have any clear idea about the system of land tenure in ancient Bengal. Our informations about the Maurya period are very little. Though a part of Bengal was annexed into the Maurya empire., the Maurya records so far have been discovered (The Mahāsthān inscriptions) do not throw much light on the system of land distribution, the fixity of tenure, the respective rights possessed by the cultivators etc. in Bengal during the time of the Mauryas. The *Mahāsthān inscription* only mentions the grant of paddy and probably also of money to the people by way of loan in order to relieve their distress during the time of famine².

The Copper Plate Pattaulis (so far discovered) of ancient Bengal can be divided into two groups, viz. (i) the Pattaulis of the Pre-Pāla period (the Gupta and the post-Gupta period from the 5th century A.D. to 8th century A.D.) and (ii) the Pattaulis of the Pāla and Sena period's. To get information about the Pre-Pāla period we have to depend on group (i). Among the Copper Plate Inscriptions of the Gupta and the Post-Gupta periods we must have to mention the five copper plates found in the village of Dāmadarpur in the Dinājpur districts of North Bengal. They refer to sale of lands in the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* and Koṭivarsha Vishaya. From the *Dāmodarpur Copper Plate Inscription* of Kumār-Gupta we come to know that Kumāra Gupta of the Gupta dynasty appointed Chirātadatta in the office of uparikā in the province (*bhukti*) of Puṇḍravardhana; and *Kumāramātya* Vetravarmaṇa, appointed by him (Chirādatta) was the ever prospering in district of Kolivarsha³. Vetravarmaṇa had been administering the government in the locality with the assistance of Dhṛitipāla, the guild president of the town, Bandhumitra, the merchant, Bhṛitimitra, the chief artisan and Sāmbapāla, the chief scribe. To them applied a Brāhmaṇa named Karpaṭika for a piece of Khilā-land which was yet unploughed according to *nivi-dharma* at the rate of three dīnāras for each Kulyavāpa, for the convenience of his agnihotra rites. After a careful examination by the record

keepers Risidatta, Jayanandin and Vibhudatta, one *Kulyavāpa* land was given to him in the region of north-west of Donga in lieu of three 'dināras'⁴.

From this inscription it appears that one or more than one person might apply to the local governors (Kumārāmātya) for the purpose of buying lands. In the Baigrām Pattauli we find two brothers named Bhoyila and Bhāskar applied to the local governors for the purpose of buying land⁵. In the Pāhādpur Inscriptions we find that a Brāhmana named Nāthasharman and his wife Rāmī made a joint petition for this purpose⁶. Any body even a government official might apply for land. In the *Gunāigarh Inscription* we find that Mahārāja Rudradatta, a government official of high rank applied for land. The *Gunāigarh Inscriptions* do not clearly mention if Rudradatta purchased the land in lieu of money or he received it as gift⁷. The other Pattaulis like the No. I Pattaulis of Dharmāditya, Pattauli of Gopachandra, Pattauli of Lokenāth mention the name of the buyers of the land and they were almost high government officials; these Pattaulis do not clearly mention the price of the land or if these officers paid it at all⁸.

From these Copper Plate Inscriptions (or Pattaulis) of the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods it appears that the lands were generally classified into three categories, viz. (a) *Vāstubhūmi* (plots for residence), (b) *Kshetra bhūmi* (the land for regular cultivation) and *Khilā kshetra* (barren lands cultivated after a gap of two or three years).

From these inscriptions we get much informations about the process of selling lands by the Government. Generally the persons, willing to purchase land, applied to the local government representatives and in their prayer they clearly mentioned the type of land they required. They also stated clearly the purpose of buying and the price which they were willing to pay for the land. From these inscriptions we come to know that in most cases the people purchased the land for the purpose of donation to the Brahmanas or for erecting temples⁹.

Having received the prayer of the applicant the government

representative (the Upārika Mahārāja or Kumārāmātya) made an enquiry about the land through the office of the Pustapāla, (keeper of records). The statement of the Pusāpālā was very important and naturally he played an important role in the transactions of the sale. The Pustapāla used to preserve the important records of the lands of his area¹⁰. Through him the government came to know about the details of the land, viz, the value of the land, it's productive power and fertility, the revenue of the land etc. It is interesting to note that besides these officers a large number of other persons, certainly not regular officials, were consulted in connection with the transaction of the sale of land. From *Baigrām copper plate* we come to know that as soon as the collector received the application for purchase of land he referred the matter to his office (viśhay-ādhikarana) and also informed it to the village householders along with Brāhmaṇas, and Chief Officers of the locality where the land was situated¹¹.

If no objection was found, the government might sell the land to the applicant in lieu of money (*Dīnāras*). But the government had to impose certain terms and conditions before the transaction of land took place. The buyers were asked to make over by fixing the boundaries on four sides with marks of chaff and charcoal which should be permanent; after having defined the area by the measurement of 8 x 9 reeds by the hands of *Darvīkarmma*, in places. He should have no conflict with his own agricultural work and he should preserve it for all time to come by the principle of perpetual endowment¹². The administrative agents and others should preserve it out of regard for religious merit. The transaction of land took place in presence of a board consisting of government officials. The village headmen and the Brāhmaṇa Kutumbas, the Nagara Śreṣṭhin, Sārthavāha, Pratama Kāyastha, Prathama Kulika etc, were to give their consent before the transaction.¹³

During the time of sale transaction of land the term *askshaya-nivi-dharma*¹⁴ was imposed on the buyers. It is already noted that general terms were imposed on the buyers. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that the buyer got the eternal right to enjoy the income of

the land but he did not have any right to make any damage of the land. He could not sale the land or transfer the land to others¹⁵.

The people willing to donate the land for religious purpose made a statement about his purpose. Proper registrations on the Pataulis were made by using the seal of the government.

Some inscriptions of the Gupta and the post-Gupta period like the Guṇāigarh inscriptions (Pataulis) of Vainya Gupta (6th century A.D) *Vāppāghoshvaṭa Inscriptions* of Jayanāga (7th century A.D.), the *Ashrafpur Inscriptions* of Devakhadga etc. only describe the donation of lands, they do not mention the system of buying lands or the price of lands. So these inscriptions can not be compared with the inscriptions mentioned in the previous chapters.

From the *Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscriptions* of Bhāskaravarmana we come to know that one of his predecessors named Bhūti-varmana donated lands to some Brāhmaṇas but their copper plates had been damaged by fire. To avoid the possible disputes the successors of these Brāhmaṇas (who received land from Bhūti-varmana) renewed their rights from Bhāskaravarmana by the *Nidhanpur copper plates*.

The inscriptions, mentioned in the above chapter, mainly described the system of donation of lands. There are other inscriptions which describe the process of buying land. Brihaspati, a *Smṛitikāra* of the 6th or 7th century A.D, says that the inscriptions which narrate the process of buying lands for residence (*vāstu*), *Kshetra* or other type of lands in lieu of exact price are called the inscriptions of buying lands. In these cases the buyers also followed some rules and regulations of the country.

From the *Arthaśāstra* we come to know the existing customs (as well as rules and regulations) for buying lands. When a man purchased a plot for residence (*vāstu*) ponds or pools, *kshetra*. etc., he purchased the land in presence of the Kutumbas, Prativeśis, and rich men. The proposed land were to be sold to the buyers who agreed to pay the highest price¹⁶. The buyers paid a tax on the price of the land. But in the inscriptions of Bengal we do not find mention of any taxes on the price of the land. Dr. N.R. Roy

thinks that it is not difficult to find out the causes behind it. These lands were probably purchased for the purpose of religious endowment, so they were exempted from taxation¹⁷. These inscriptions only refer to the donation or sale of lands by the government officials. But the question may be raised in our minds about the procedure of selling of lands by the individual or common people. These inscriptions do not throw any light on it. They are silent about the right of the people to sale their personal property and what kind of taxes were to be paid by them to the government during the time of selling or transferring lands.

Probably from the very early time the people of Bengal had a great thirst for land and they did not like to sell their land. They did it only in case of dire necessity. But for the absence of evidences we cannot make any comment about the procedure of selling of private land and rate of taxes.

The inscriptions of the Gupta and Post-Gupta period, mention that in most cases the rich people and government officials purchased the lands for observing religious duties. But the inscriptions of the Pāla and Sena periods present a different picture. The people did not take the initiative. Initiative for donation of lands for religious purposes or for maintaining the expenditures of the religious temples and *vihāras* were taken by the kings alone. The people had little share in it.

From these inscriptions it is clear that in the Pre-Pāla period (or the Gupta and post-Gupta periods) the act of building up temples and *vihāras* and their maintenance were a joint responsibility whereas in the Pāla and Sena periods it was the responsibility of the government alone. The people showed little interest to pay money for the maintenance of *vihāras* and temples.

The affluence of wealth in the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods might have encouraged the rich and wealthy section to spend a large amount of money for the purpose of constructing temples and *vihāras* and observing the religious duties. But in the Pāla and Sena periods the gradual decline of trade and commerce contracted their financial capacity. Moreover the gradual dependence on land made them zealous for land and

thus the responsibility had been entrusted on the hands of the government.

In the previous chapters we have discussed the procedures of selling the lands by the government. From these inscriptions we come to know that whenever a man made a prayer to the government for buying land, he had to make the request by the following terms, "Please accept the actual price of the land and donate it to me". Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that the term 'donation' was used in the prayer to get exemption from the taxes for the land¹⁸.

The government generally imposed certain terms on the buyer during the time of selling (land). The terms were generally classified into four categories, viz., 1) the term of *Nividharmana*¹⁹ 2) the term of *Apradanividharma*²⁰, 3) the term of *Akshaynividharma*²¹ and 4) *Apradaakshaynividharma*²². The term *Akshaynividharma* gave the buyer a right to enjoy the land for ever. The term *Apradanividharma* indicated that the buyer had no right to sale or donate the land which he had bought from the government. There might be some differences between the terms *Nividharma* and *Apradaakshaynividharma*. From these terms it appears that though the buyer had bought the right to enjoy the land as his capital, he did not have any right to make any damage of the land. The government could get back the land from the buyers in case of necessity. It also indicated that the government was the actual owner of the land and the right of the Government on the land had been established firmly.

It is already noted that the terms like *Vāstu* (residential plot), *Kshetra* (the field used for regular cultivation), *Khila Kshetra* (the lands where cultivations were done irregularly). Besides these we find some other terms in these inscriptions. They were *haṭṭa* or *haṭṭika* (market) *ghaṭṭa* (ferry path), *Gobāt*. (grazing field) *gomārg*, *go path*, *go char* etc (these terms indicate the way through which the cows used to walk or graze in the fields). We have also the terms like *jālā jolak* (low lands filled in water), *Khāt*, *Khātika*, *Khāḍi*, *Yānikā*, *Srotikā* *Gangānikā*, *Hajjik*, *Khāl*, *Bil*, *Tālbatak* etc. These terms indicate the pond, pools, canals, streams, drains etc. The

terms *bāts* and *mārgas* are referred to in these inscriptions. The term '*bāt*' might indicate the way used as boundaries and the *mārgas* were public roads.

A section of people in villages used to earn their livelihood through tending of cattle. For the purpose of grazing cattle some fields were preserved by the villagers outside the village or on the border of the village. They were called *Gōbāt*, *Gōchāran* etc. They were the common property of the villagers.

For the purpose of measurement of land these inscriptions used some terms. The highest unit of measurement was *Kulya-* (or *Kulyabāpa*)²³ next to *Kulyā* was *Droaṇ*^{23A} (or *Droanabāp*) and the lowest unit was *Āḍhabap*. According to some scholars the measurement of the land was done according to the capacity for sowing seeds. The writers of *the Corpus of Bengal inscriptions* think that 8 *dronas* make one *Kulyavāpa*²⁴. Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that the land where the seeds full of a *Kulyā* (or *Kulā*, Eng, winn-owing fan) could be sowed, while *Droanabāp* indicated the land where a full *Droana*; of seeds (a small type of earthen pitcher) could be sown and *Āḍha-bāp* indicated the land where a full *Āḍha* (a kind of small casket made of reed) of seeds could be sown²⁵. The *Śavdakalpadruma* gives a definite version of this measurement. It says that *Āḍha* indicates 16 to 20 Seer of rice, a *Droanā* 64 to 80 Seer of rice and a *Kulyā* 512 to 840 Seer of rice. From this it is clear that *Kulyabāpa* indicates a large field and *Droanabāpa* three times bigger than *Āḍhabāpa*. But these units cannot throw any light on the actual measurement of the land. The people as well as government used different types of measurement instruments in different regions of Bengal. The *nālās* were also used for the purpose of measurement. Two *nālās*, nine or eight cubit long were also used for measuring, respectively, the length and breadth of the area. Taking the average measurement of a *hasta* to be 19 inches, the area would be 19 x 8 x 19 x 9 or 25599 square area inches. But it is difficult to find out how many times the area a *Kulyabāpa* contained.

The inscriptions of the Pre-Pāla period throw much light on the price of lands. From these inscriptions we come to know

that the buyers paid the price during the time of buying lands and the prices varied from one place to another. From the four *Dāmodar-pur Copper Inscriptions, Faridpur Inscriptions, and Vaigrām Inscriptions* we learn that the price of a *Kulyabāpa* land at Puṇḍravardhana and Koṭivarsha was three *ḍīnāras*. while it was four *ḍīnāras* for Samatata (according to Faridpur inscriptions)²⁶ and two *ḍīnāras* at Varendrabhūmi (according to Baigrām inscriptions)²⁷ Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that 1 *ḍīnāra* of ancient Bengal was not less than Rs. 96/- of present times²⁸. These inscriptions also tell the increasing demand for the cultivated lands among the people of Bengal. The price of land must have risen in the Pāla and Sena periods when trade and commerce were on the way to decline and the people were to depend more and more on the land. For this the interest of the people to donate lands for religious purposes had been reduced and the government had to bear the responsibility for maintaining the religious temples and *Vihāras*.

It is already noted that during the time of selling, land consent was taken from the important inhabitants of the locality. To avoid the future boundary dispute the buyers were asked to make over by fixing their boundaries on four sides with marks of chaff and charcoal which will be permanent, after having defined the area by the measurement of 8 x 9 reeds by the hands of *Darvikaramma* (demarcation), the buyer was asked to preserve the boundaries for ever with permanent marks of chaff and charcoal²⁹.

These inscriptions also tell about the gradual consciousness of the people about their boundaries. In the Sena period when the society had taken a pure feudalistic outlook, the people put much emphasis on the preservation of the boundaries of their lands. The lowest unit of the land at that time was *Kākani* (much lower than *Ādhabāp*). Sometimes, in order to describe the boundaries, the pools, rivers, trees, roads etc. were mentioned. The office of the *Pustapāla* kept valuable records of the lands.

Possibly no restrictions were imposed by the government on the buying of land. The people could purchase according to

their maximum capacity. From these *Pattaulis* we also learn about the rights of the buyers on their lands and the rights of the government. We have already noted that certain terms were imposed by the government during the time of selling (lands). The King did not generally give up all rights from the land. The owner of the land had to pay one-sixth of the total production to the revenue department as a tax. But whenever a man purchased a land for religious endowment, he received exemption from this tax. It was believed that the King would get a share of his virtuous deeds by exempting him from this tax.

The *Arthaśāstra*, the Copper Plates and the works of the contemporary *Smṛitikārās* describe the sources of income from the forest. The *Arthaśāstra* and the works of the *Smṛitikārās* give instructions to the people how they should remove forest for setting up locality. Kautilya allows to remove forest for the settlement of the Brāhmaṇas.

Kautilya thinks that the minerals, salt, etc. preserved in mines, are the property of the government. He gives instructions about them. From him we come to know how they should be utilised and taxes were to be imposed on them.

The Revenue: The revenue of the land was the main source of income of the royal exchequer. Besides revenue it had other sources of income. The king could impose taxes on certain things. Kautilya gives a list in his works on which the king could impose taxes. According to him the king had a right to impose taxes on salt, forest, markets, ferry etc. From the *Pattaulis* of the Pre-pala period we learn that the kings generally exempted taxes from the lands donated for religious purposes. But he imposed taxes on the other lands. Besides land revenue, the people paid different taxes to the king like *Bhāga*, *Bhoga*, *Kar*, *Hiranya*, *Sachauradharana*, *Saghatta*, *Satar*, *Pindak*, *Upārikar* etc.

Bhāga: The people paid one-sixth of the production of the land to the king. It was called '*Bhāga*', Kautilya³⁰ and other *Smṛitikārās* of ancient India mention the term '*bhāga*' in their works. It was imposed according to the instruction of the Vedic laws.

Bhogas: Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that people were bound to

supply some necessary articles like fruits, flowers, woods etc. to the king from time to time. It was called 'bhoga'. Sometimes the people looked after the royal gardens attached to their lands. They were to pay a portion of the income of the garden to the king³¹.

Other taxes: Different types of taxes (*karas*) were collected from the people. Kauṭilya mentions three types of taxes payable to the government in cash, i) *Mudrākar*³²—the people, besides their land revenue had to pay taxes regularly for their income. It was called the *Mudrākar* (the income tax), (ii) The people had to pay taxes to the king when an emergency situation arose, (iii) The traders and merchants had to pay taxes for their income. These taxes must have been introduced in Bengal after the conquest of the land by the Aryan people.

Hiraṇya: Sometimes the king passed orders to his subjects to pay taxes by gold coins in lieu of crops or kinds. It was called *Hiraṇya*. He had to collect one sixth of the production of paddy from the farmers and one-tenth of income from the merchants³³.

Sachauradharāṇa: According to some scholars the people paid taxes to the king for their protection from thieves, robbers etc. It was called *Sachauradharāṇa*.

Saghatta Satar was an indirect ferry tax imposed on the villagers.

A kind of tax was collected by the revenue officials from the haṭṭas (Markets). In some inscriptions it is mentioned that the revenue of the haṭṭas were obtainable to the donor of the land.

Pinḍakar (or **Pinḍak**) was a tax imposed on the whole of the village by the king. It is mentioned by Kauṭilya³⁴ (Even in the Pāla period this tax is mentioned in the Khālimpur inscriptions of Dharmapāla). Possibly the people paid taxes for grazing land (gochar, gobāt etc). There are references to the term 'uparikar', but it is difficult to find out the actual meaning of the term. Some scholars think that the king collected taxes from the people belonging to the lower community while others suggest that the taxes imposed on the subjects besides their land revenue was called *uparikar* (the term *uparikar* means extra taxes). Some think that it was imposed only on the temporary tenants³⁵. From the

inscriptions of the Pāla kings we get the names of other taxes paid by the people. There were taxes like *Daśaparahā* (with the penalties for ten officers) and others. The people paid for the prohibition of, entrance by irregular and regular troops, immunity from all burdens etc). These taxes were not probably unknown in the Pre Pala period.

Besides these the people paid money to the 'Chāta' and 'Bhātas' from time to time. The exact meaning of the term 'Chāta' is not known. Possibly these 'chāta' and 'bhāta' were the king's attendants or security staff. They exacted money from the cultivators and common people. The common people used to supply the necessary articles of the kings and his high officials when they visited their land. The perquisites were paid on the occasion of the birth of a prince, marriage of the princes etc. The royal exchequer obtained different types of exercise duty and toll taxes.

It is already noted that for lack of evidences it is not possible for us to guess the rights of the people over the lands in the pre-Aryan period or what kind of taxes they paid to the government. In the early times when the Aryan invaders did not penetrate Bengal, and sufficient lands were available they might have acquired their needed land, after taking prior permission from the headmen and the other important men of the locality. But since the time of the Guptas the system had been changed. Then the king was regarded as the actual owner of the land and the people could acquire their needed land through a systematic process. The system has been discussed in details. From this system it, is obvious that inspite of his sovereign power the king took the permission of the *Prathama Kāyastha*, *Nagara-Śreṣṭhin*, *Prathama Kulika*, *Sārthavāha* and others (who had exercised great influence in the society) before giving his final consent. The rulers, since then, followed the instructions of Kauṭilya and other *Smṛitikāra* of the Aryan society to impose taxes. The growing influences of feudalism made the land costly and the kings and rulers were eager to establish their sovereign authority over the land. The gradual decline of trade and commerce contracted the

power of the merchant class. So we find that in the later period the permissions of the *Nagara Śresthin*, *Prathama Kulika*, *Prathama Kāyastha* were no longer required during the time of selling land. In the Pāla and Sena periods we find that the donated lands and villages were *khāsmahals* (the land owned by the king) and he only took a formal permission from the local headmen like *Kutumba*, *Prativaśis* etc. Actually it was a mere information to them. The donation of a village or locality in the Pāla period also indicated the scarcity of land. In the Pre-Pala period generally vacant lands were donated.

Though the grants do not generally refer to the purchases or transfer of land by individuals, it was not possibly unfamiliar to them. From the *Pattaulis* of Gopa Chandra we come to know that the king had a right to usurp the land. The women had a right to enjoy their personal property. If the statement of the *Grants of Ashrafpur* and the grants of Gopa Chandra is true we can think that the people had a right to sale and transfer their lands, though they had to take a prior permission from the ruler before this sale or transfer took place. From these *Pattaulis* we learn that even two or more people could possess a land jointly. There was a class of people living under the land-owners, who probably enjoyed little right on the land. Though we have very little idea about them, probably their position was not better than the riots of Bengal of the British period.

The *Pattaulis* of the Pre-Pāla period (i.e. Gupta and the post—Gupta periods) point out the rapid increase of population and the increasing demand of the people for land. The *Pattaulis* of this period also classified the lands into three categories. These lands were either under the possession of the kings or people. They were (i) *Apradā*³⁶, (ii) *Aprahata*³⁷ and (iii) *Khilā*³⁸. The term *Apradā* indicated land, not yet distributed, the term *Aprahata* indicated land, not ploughed till then and *Khilā* indicated land, till fallen vacant. But the rapid extension of population made the people insist on the absorption of the *Aprahata* and *Khilā* lands. The *Ashrafpur* grant reveals the growing demand of the people for more lands and they sometimes usurped-lands enjoyed by

other people. These lands were distributed again to others.

From these inscriptions we also come to know about the gradual changes in the socio-economic life of Bengal in the Pre-Pāla period. They throw light on the rapid march of the Brāhmanical faith, in Bengal. The immigration of the Brāhmanas from different parts of Northern India to Bengal and the patronage of the rulers and high officials helped to build up a solid foundation for the Brāhmanical faith in the land. From these inscriptions we also learn about the growing influences of feudalism. With the decline of trade and commerce the merchants lost their importance in the society. The kings with the help of high officials were going to establish his supreme power over the society. Society had to feel the growing influences of Feudalism. Though the final shape had taken place in the Pala period, gradual dependence of the people of Bengal more and more on the lands and the undisputed authority of the kings over the lands made the period distinct and significant. The socio-economic changes of the period can be noticed through the system of distribution of lands and the economic rights of the kings of that period.

References :

1. *BI*, Vol. I, p. 220.
2. *CBI*, (*Mahasthan Fragmentary Stone Plaque Inscription*, 3rd century B.C.), p. 39, Text line 4,5 and 6.
3. *Ibid.*, (line 2 & 3 *Bhuktadupārik-Ciratadatta nanu balabanak-Kotivarsha-Vishay-e, ch-ta-ni juktak-Kumaramatya-Vetravarmanya...*) p. 45.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
6. *Ibid.* (*Pāhāḍpur Copper Plate Inscription of the Gupta year 159, 479 A.D.*), p. 54.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-67.
8. *BI*, Vol. I, p. 221.
9. Roy Bharat Kumār: *Prachin Bhārater-Lekha Sāhitya*, pp. 165-67.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
11. *CBI*, (*Baigrām Copper Plate Inscription of the Gupta year 128, 448 AD*), Line, 9,10 and 11, p. 50.
12. *HAB*, p. 291.

13. Roy, B.K.: *Prachin Bhārater Lekha Sāhitya*, p. 160.
14. C B I, (*Dāmodarpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the time of Kumara Gupta I, 448 AD, line 6-7), Design to make a gift (of land) to me according to the customary rule of *Apradāksaynivi* for my performance of five daily sacrifice, p. 47.
15. *B I*, p. 228-29
16. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
19. C B I, : *Dhanāidah Copper Plate Inscription* of Kumāragupta I, Line 8, p. 42.
20. *Ibid.*, : *Dāmadarpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the time of Gupta , 543 ADJ, line 10.
21. *Ibid.*, : *Pāhādpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the Gupta year 159, 479 AD); line, 19, p. 55.
22. *Ibid.* (*Dāmodarpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the time of Kumāragupta I, 448 AD, line 7), p. 47.
23. *Ibid.* (*Damodarpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the time of Kumargupta-I, 448 AD, Line 8,). p. 48.
- 23A. Same Inscription, Line, 9.
24. "8 Dronas make one Kulyāvapa" quoted from C B I, p. 49, 4 ādhavapas make 1 Dronavāpas, and 8 dronavāpas make one Kulyavāpas, C B I, p. 58.
25. *B I*, Vol. I, p. 237.
26. C B I, (*Faridpur Copper Plate Inscription* of Dharmādity –Regnal year 3, line 15), p. 76.
27. *Ibid.* (*Baigrām Copper Plate Inscription* of the Gupta year 128, 448 AD, line 6,), p. 50.
28. *B I*, p. 245.
29. CBI, (*Baigrām Copper Plate Inscription*, of the Gupta year 128, 3B AD, Line 18-19), p. 51.
30. Kautilya: *Arthaśāstra* (Beng. trans, by R. G. Basak, Vol. I, p. 83.
31. *B I*, p. 253.
32. Kautilya: *Arthaśāstra* (Beng. trans by R.G. Basak, Vo 1.1, pp. 168-70.), B.I. P-253.
33. B.I. p. 253.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
35. *B I*, p. 254.
36. C B I, (*Damodarpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the time of Budhagupta, Line, 7) p. 62.
37. *Ibid* (*Dāmodarpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the time of Kumāra Gupta I, 444 AD, line 7) p. 45.
38. *Ibid* (*Pāhādpur Copper Plate Inscription* of the Gupta year 159, 479 AD) Line, 5, p. 54.

CHAPTER V

SYSTEM OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

Part - I

It is not possible for scholars to find out the condition of education in Bengal of the Pre-Gupta period. No definite idea about the development of literature and learning of that period can be formed due to lack of information and authentic evidences. However, from archaeological explorations, from the customs and practices of the native people and from the folk songs and tales of Bengal it may be presumed that the folk tribes of Bengal were not far behind in cultural development from the Aryan tribes. They had developed a particular type of civilisation. But the sources neither throw light on the system of education in Bengal nor do they give any idea about the actual development of literature and learning during the Pre-Aryan period.

Their language was unintelligible to the Aryans and their usages as well as customs and practices were looked down upon by the Vedic Aryans. The attitude of the Aryans towards the native people of Bengal can be imagined from their works of the early period. The *Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa* describes the people of Bengal as Asuras¹, while the *Acītārāya Brāhmaṇa*² describes the people of Puṇḍras as Dasyus (robbers). The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*³ refers to Bengal as the land of untouchable people and prescribes a penance for those who visit Puṇḍra and Vāṅga.

Even after the Aryanisation of Bengal, the orthodox section of the people of Northern India could not change their contemptuous attitude towards the people of Bengal. They were eager to point out the errors in the pronunciations of the people of Bengal. *Pāṇini* regarded the spellings of the people of eastern India as incorrect. *Patañjali*, the author of *Mahābhāṣya* made a

distinction between the spellings of the people of Northern India and those of eastern India⁴.

These differences of spellings were due to the influence of the proto - Austroloid and the Dravidian dialects. Prof. N.R. Roy thinks that a Non-Aryan literature might have developed in eastern India but it cannot be traced now. In the absence of any reliable source it is not possible for us to have any idea about the development and progress of that literature⁵.

Sanskrit along with the Aryan literature had made its way to Bengal since the time of the Mauryas, who had conquered and annexed Puṇḍravardhana and some other parts of Bengal into their empire. A great number of ascetics and preachers of Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivikism as well as traders and merchants entered Bengal from this time. They encouraged the people to use the Prākṛits and Sanskrit for the development of their literature.

In this connection it can be reminded here that the two great prophets viz. Gautama Buddha and Mahāvira preached in the language of the common people, i.e., the regional Prākṛits, and not Sanskrit, The *Mahāsthāngar inscription* (Bogora district) of the Maurya period is written in Prākṛit⁶. Sanskrit gradually asserted itself only from the Gupta period.

It is already noted that Bengal acknowledged the supremacy of the rulers of Northern India from the time of the Guptas. The patronage of Sanskrit by the Gupta rulers helped much for the development of Sanskrit language and literature throughout Northern India. The thorough cultivation of Sanskrit by the upper community of Bengal had begun from that time. The *Śuśūniā inscription* of *Chandravarman* of the 4th century A.D. is the earliest inscription in Sanskrit found in Bengal⁷. But the people were not, probably, well-conversant in Sanskrit till then, and therefore, they composed the brief inscription in prose. Subsequently, the learned section became well accomplished in that language and composed the inscriptions in beautiful verses. The development of Sanskrit can be noticed from the inscriptions of the 7th century A.D. They were full of similies and Metaphors. From this time 'The Gaudia Riti' had become proverbial for

Bengal. From the time of the Guptas two parallel system of education, viz. the Buddhist and the Brāhmaṇic had begun to flourish in Bengal.

From the time of the Guptas a number of travellers began to visit India. They came to visit the sacred places of Buddhism and the Buddhist *viḥāras* of India. They also visited the Buddhist *viḥāras* of Bengal. Among the Chinese travellers we have the names of Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, Cheng-Teng, Tao-Lin and others. From their descriptions we have an idea about the condition of Buddhist education in Bengal of the Gupta and the post Gupta periods. From them, we come to know that the Buddhist *Vihāras* and monasteries were the centres of learning and there besides Buddhist theology, different subjects were taught. Subjects like Grammar, Phonetics, Astronomy, Philosophy, Medical Sciences, Vedas, Śāṅkhyas, Yoga, Music, Poetics, Paintings, eighteen *Nikāyas* etc. formed the curriculum of education in these places.

Fa-Hien, who came to visit India during the reign of Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty, had made an extensive tour through the *Vihāras*, of Bengal. The object of his mission was to collect the books of discipline. He wanted to collect from India the *Vinaya* text for the Buddhist *Vihāras* of China. Prof. R. K. Mukherjee in his works '*Ancient Indian Education*' says that though Fa-Hien confined his observations only to that aspect of Indian thought; and life which were associated with Buddhism, his observations were realistic, positive and concrete. Through his observations the students of history may form an idea about the existing system of education of Bengal as well as India.

Fa-Hien visited most of the important Buddhist monasteries of eastern India. He came to Tāmralipta at the end of his journey. From Fa-Hien we come to know that Tāmralipta was a flourishing centre of learning of Buddhism with twenty-two monasteries⁸. A large number of monks resided in these monasteries. He stayed there for two years for copying the manuscripts (preserved in different monasteries of Tāmralipta). He was much impressed by the interest in learning as seen in the five capital towns of Bengal which he had visited during the course of his travels.

The most remarkable Chinese traveller of the 7th century A.D. was Hiuen Tsang. 'The mission of Hiuen Tsang was to visit the holy land of Buddhism, to see its famous shrines and all visible evidences of Buddha's ministrations, to procure the sacred books of his religion in their original language and to learn the true meaning of their doctrines from learned scholars of India. He extensively travelled in India and has given a chart of the monasteries of India. From him we come to know about the famous monasteries of Bengal. His observations about the monasteries of Bengal also throw much light on the existing system of education in Bengal in the first half of the 7th century A.D.

Hiuen Tsang had seen six or seven monasteries in Ka-jangala (modern Rājmaḥal) with 300 Brethren⁹, all belonging to the Hīnayāṇ school. At that time Puṇḍravardhana was a centre of Buddhist learning. He has seen there twenty monasteries and above three thousand brethren, following both the Hīnayāṇ and Mahāyāna school¹⁰. In the vicinity of Puṇḍravardhana there existed a magnificent Buddhist monastery named Po-si-Po-Vihāra. He informs us that the vihāra had spacious yards. At that time 700 Brethren of the Mahāyāna school resided and 'among them there were many distinguished monks of eastern India¹¹.' From his description we come to know that more than thirty Buddhist monasteries existed in Samatata in the first half of the 7th century A.D., where about 200 Brethren resided. Most of the monasteries belonged to the Sthaviravāda school at Samatata¹².

When Hiuen Tsang came to visit Tāmralipta he noticed the existence of ten Buddhist monasteries at Tāmralipta¹³, though during the time of the visit of Fa-Hien twenty-two monasteries existed there. In these monasteries 1000 brethren resided. Buddhism might have lost its former strength at Tāmralipta. But in Karnaśuvārṇa, the capital of Śaśāṅka (though Śaśāṅka had died sometimes earlier when he visited the city), Buddhism was in a flourishing condition. There were ten monasteries, and about two thousand Brethren resided in the monasteries¹⁴. They belonged to the Samatīya school. He also found the other monasteries

belonging to the Devadatta school. Near the capital there existed the famous Raktamrittikā monastery (Lo-To-Mo-Chiah-Vihāra). He speaks highly about the general character of the people of Kāṇasuvārṇa. From him we come to know that the people gave much importance on the cultivation of knowledge¹⁵.

Hiuen Tsang also gives some information about the existing Brāhmanic system of education in ancient Bengal. Most of the Brāhmanic schools had been set up near the famous Hindu temples of Bengal. From these evidences it can be presumed that the Aryan philosophy and education had been deeply rooted in the soil of Bengal in the 6th and 7th centuries A.D.

Different subjects like Grammar Phonetics, Sāṅkhya, Theology, Medical Science, four Vedas, Music, Paintings, Mahāyāna literature, Yogaśāstra, astronomy etc. were taught in the Buddhist *vihāras*, while the Brahmanical school used to teach Brāhmanical philosophy, and other branches of science and education useful in the practical life¹⁶.

I-Tsing, who visited India soon after Hiuen Tsang, came to visit Tāmralipta in course of his travel to eastern India, During his time also Tāmralipta was a centre of Buddhist learning. He stayed at Tāmralipta for four months. He learnt Sanskrit and science of Grammar at Tāmralipta. He gives a vivid description about the organisation and function of the *Bra-ra-la* monas-tery. He met Ta Cheng Teng, another Chinese traveller at the *Bra-ra-la* monastery. I-Tsing also translated the famous Buddhist text, the '*Nāgārjuna-Vodhisattva Sruhidlek*' into Chinese from Sanskrit¹⁷.

Ta-Cheng Teng, a Chinese Śramaṇa, who met I-Tsing at *Bra-ra-la* monastery, stayed at Tāmralipta for twelve years. He learnt Sanskrit to read the Buddhist texts written in Sanskrit. He had got authority in the philosophy of Buddhism and made interpretations of some Buddhist texts (like the *Nidāna Śāstras* of Ullanga) when he went back to China. We have also the name of Tao-lin who spent three years at Tāmralipta and converted into the Śārvāstivāda Nikāya school there. From the accounts of Seng-Che, we come to know that in the second half of the 7th century A.D. the king of Samataṭa was Rājabhaṭa, who was a devout

worshipper of the *triratna* and played the part of a great upāsaka. He used to recite hundred thousand ślokas (hymns) of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* every day.

From the accounts of the Chinese travellers it appears clearly that Tāmralipta was not only the greatest port of Bengal; it was also one of the greatest centres of learning of eastern India in the Gupta and the post Gupta periods. Besides Tāmralipta and Pundravardhana, we have the names of Karnasuvarna, Siddhala, Valagrāma, Jagddals, Vikrampur, Devikotā and some other places of Varendra Brūmi and Samatata which had become the centres of learning. A large number of *Vihāras* and Buddhist institutions were set up under the patronage of the great Pāla Kings of Bengal in the second part of the 8th century A.D. and the first part of the 9th century A.D. They, no doubt, helped to spread out the fame of Bengal to different parts of India.

Though the *Vihāras* (as well as Buddhist institutions) had put emphasis on the Buddhist theology, they did not neglect other subjects. It is already noted that besides Buddhist philosophy and religion, the pupils had to study Grammar, dialects, Medicine, Four Vedas, Sāṅkhya, Music and arts, eighteen *Nikāyavāda*, lexicography, astronomy and other subjects. It is already mentioned that the Brāhmanical institutions, which grew up in different parts of Bengal, also cultivated different branches of science and literature. Dr. N. R. Roy thinks that thorough cultivation of Sanskrit language and literature, different branches of science had been started in different Buddhist and Brāhmanical educational institutions of Bengal from the 6th and 7th centuries, A.D. It paid a good dividend within a century¹⁸. The influence of the Brāhmanical system of education possibly had been confined within the upper castes of Hinduism.

From Hiuen Tsang we come to know that in the science of lexicography the scholars of Bengal had shown great proficiency. In the field of medical science Bengali scholars had established their fame far and wide. Hiuen Tsang says that a great stress was given on the study of these sciences at Nālandā. Possibly the *Vihāras* of Bengal were not far behind in this respect. From the

very ancient times the *Hastīāyurveda*, a medical science dealing with the disease of elephants, had been developed in Bengal. The physicians of elephants had shown a great proficiency in detecting their disease and nursing the wounds of the elephants. They had a great fame in this science. In spite of the existence of the Brāhmanical institutions, the superiority of the Buddhist *vihāras* in the field of education during the time of Hiuen Tsang (First part of the 7th century A.D.) cannot be denied. During the time of his visit he found the existence of eighteen Buddhist sects in Bengal, but he especially mentions the *Hinayāna*, *Mahāyāna* and *Sthaviravāda* schools in his works. These three schools, viz. the *Hinayāna*, *Mahāyāna* and *Sthaviravāda* schools had played a great part in imparting the Buddhist system of education in Bengal in the 7th century A.D. Besides the Buddhist *Vihāras* of Bengal, the Śramanas (as well as students) of Bengal used to visit the famous *Vihāras* and other educational institutions of Bihar and Northern India for the purpose of getting higher education. Magadha was the most advanced state in Northern India in the field of education when Hiuen Tsang visited India. The students of Bengal had earned much reputation for their eagerness for learning. A number of Bengali preceptors were engaged in teaching in the *Vihāras* of Magadha. Among these preceptors we must have to mention the name of Śilabhadra. Hiuen Tsang had got an opportunity to learn the Buddhist theology and *Yogaśāstra* under him. Śilabhadra was promoted to the rank of the celebrated Principal of the *Nālandā Mahāvihara* (University). His fame had been spread out even outside India. The students of Bengal not only visited Magadha for higher education, they also visited distant lands. From the writings of Kshemendra, a poet of Kāshmir (of the 9th century A.D.) we know that in the Pāla period a large number of students of Bengal visited Kāshmir to acquire knowledge in different subjects.

The Buddhist scholars of Bengal had shown proficiency in different subjects. Hundreds of works in different aspects, Buddhist religion and other subjects were written by the scholars of Bengal. Unfortunately most of the works had been either

destroyed or lost with the decay of the monasteries. A few of them survived through the efforts of the Buddhist monks of Tibet, China and central Asia. These works had been translated by them into their own languages. The original manuscripts have been lost. Through these translated copies we can have some idea about the genius of the scholars of Bengal.

Among these works, 'The Ārya Buddha Bhumi Bākhyān' of Śilabhadra can be mentioned here. It had been translated into the Tibetan language¹⁹. There is no trace of the original works of Śilabhadra at present.

It may be pointed out here that the Buddhist scholars had a great contribution towards the development of the earliest Bengali literature. Dr. S.B. Sarkar holds the view that Bengali language and literature had got much inspiration from the religious doctrines and practices of the Sahajīyā cult in the early period²⁰ which was a peculiar development of a phase of later Buddhism. It had flourished in the pala period. The authors of the Sahajīyā Buddhist songs (Bauddha gān ó dohā) were mostly inhabitants of Bengal or of the vicinities of Bengal. In order to make the vernacular language and literature more popular they began to use western Apabhramśa and other popular dialects in lieu of Sanskrit. It facilitated the growth and development of Bengali language and literature subsequently. But the attempt to develop language of the masses and literature had, possibly, started from the 8th century A.D. and the Buddhist monks and scholars seemed to have taken the initiative in this respect.

The fame of Bengal for the development of education and culture had reached its zenith during the time of the Pālas. A number of remarkable Buddhist *vihāras* like Somapuri, Vikramśilā, Jagaddal (near Ramābati) etc. had been set up under the patronage of the Pāla rulers. A number of great scholars like Bodhi bhadra, Ācharya Kalapa, Atīs Dīpamkara, Sthavira Briddha Birendra Ācharya, Śubhākar Gupta, Abhadut Ācharya, Kumāra Chandra, Haribhadra had appeared in the Pāla Age. The development of education and culture led her to the Golden Age. But it was not a sudden phenomena. Its ground work was

prepared gradually during the Gupta and the Post-Gupta periods. In spite of the disturbed political situation during the *Mātsyaṇyāya* (Pre-Pāla) period, the scholars of Bengal had been able to kindle the light of knowledge which was carried on and made more bright during the succeeding age.

The gradual progress of Bengal in the field of education and culture in the post-Gupta period (as well as Pre-Pāla period) made the history of Bengal distinct and bright.

The Śramaṇas, who resided at the different monasteries of Bengal were to take the initiative in spreading out education. It is already noted that some of the scholars had a great reputation and the Chinese Śramaṇas like Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsang, Seng-Chi, I-Tsing and others learnt Buddhist theology under them. They praised the profound knowledge of their preceptors.

The Brāhmaṇical system of education had begun to develop from the 6th and 7th centuries A.D. But it took some time to have a strong hold over the soils of Bengal. It had been flourished in the Sena period.

Though the Jain monasteries had been set up in Bengal from the very early times (from the 6th century B.C.) and a number of monkas resided in these monasteries, we do not have any clear idea about the system of education introduced by the Jain monks of Bengal. Possibly, the Jain monks had been engaged in studying the scriptures and philosophical works of their religion. They had no wide mass contact like the Buddhist Śramaṇas and their system of education had been confined within the inmates of their monasteries.

PART - II

THE GREAT EDUCATIONISTS OF ANCIENT BENGAL (Pre-Pāla Period)

From the time of Mahāsthān inscription the gradual progress of Bengal in the field of education may be observed. It is already noted that a large number of educational institutions had been set up in ancient Bengal. From the writings of Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang and other Chinese Śramaṇas we come to know that valuable Buddhist texts had been preserved in some of these great *vihāras*. Like the mediaeval monasteries of Europe, the *vihāras* were the centres of learning. The students studied under their preceptors not only the Buddhist scriptures and theology but also different branches of knowledge like *Kāvya* (poems), *Alaṃkāra* (Rhetorics), medicine, astronomy paintings, four Vedas and other subjects. Sanskrit was the medium of instruction. The thorough cultivation of knowledge gave them proficiency in different subjects. Some of the preceptors (like Śilabhadra) of the *Vihāras* and temples dedicated their life for imparting knowledge to their pupils. Among the great scholars of ancient Bengal of Pre-Pāla period the names of Chandraḡomin, Jinendrabodhi, Sārāh Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇ, Śilabhadra and Gouripada should be remembered with much respects.

Chandragomin : was the founder of Chandra school of Grammar. Most of the scholars of present times think that he was a native of Bengal. They believe it mainly on the basis of Tibetan traditions²¹. The Tibetan works '*Prāg-Sam-Jen-Jang*' refers to him as a Kshastriya of Varendrabhūmi. Though Dr. R.C. Majumdar is not inclined to accept him as a Bengalee²², Dr. N.R. Roy holds a different view. He surmises that his surname Gomin might have come from the present Bengali title Guṇ²³. He also suggests that he was a native of Varendrabhūmi. He might have

flourished about the 7th century A.D. Prof. R.K. Mukherjee assigns²⁴ him to the period between 460 A.D. and 660 A.D. From the available evidences it appears that he hailed from eastern India. A story in the Tibetan text *Prag-Sam-Jen-Jang* connects his name with Varendra and Chandradvīpa.

He was one of the best products of the Nālandā Mahāvihāra. He was the author of as many as sixty books in Sanskrit on Buddhism, which were later on translated into Tibetan. He studied in Nālandā under two great preceptors viz., Sthiramati and Aśoka. He was converted to Buddhism by his preceptors. While he was travelling the south he wrote a commentary on Pāṇini. Possibly he passed his later life in Chandradvīpa.

Chandragomin was a follower of Pāṇini. But he omitted the rules of Pāṇini about the Vedic Grammar in order to make his works free from the traditional Brāhmaṇical elements. His original contributions were thirty five *sūtras*. They were later borrowed by Kāśikā without acknowledgement. According to the Tibetan tradition he had great authority in logic and wrote a book entitled '*Nayāsiddhalok*'. He wrote as many as thirty six books in the Tāntrik Vajrayāna ideas. Besides these he composed hymns on the Goddesses Tārā and Mañjuśree. He wrote a play *Lokananda* and a poem '*Sishyalekha-dharma*'. He got proficiency in several subjects like Grammar, Literature, Astronomy and Medicine.

The works of Chandragomin were popular among the Buddhist monks and they are still cultivated in Tibet and in a modified form in Śrīlankā. It was also popular in Japan. Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that the Gramamarian and Logician Chandragomin might be the same person, but Bajradhani Chandragomin cannot be identified with him²⁵.

Śīlabhadra : The scholar, who had drawn great admiration of the pupils of the Nālandā Mahāvihāra, was Śīlabhadra. From Hiuen Tsang we come to know that he was born in a royal family of Samatata²⁶. By caste he was a Brahmin. Having received education from different *viḥāras* and institutions of India he settled in Nālandā permanently. He became one of the celebrated heads of the Nālandā *Vihāra*. He was a disciple of Dharmapāla and is

said to have defeated a learned scholar of South India in a scholarly duel. His depth of knowledge attracted admiration from the local king (probably the king of Magadha), who offered him a city. Though at first the offer was rejected, Śīlabhadra accepted it later on. He built a Buddhist monastery there. It was named after him²⁷.

Silabhadra was promoted to the post of *Mahā Āchārya* of the Nālandā Mahāvihāra. His fame spread out even outside India. He was conversant with different subjects. Hiuen Tsang was a disciple of Silabhadra. He stayed in the Nālandā Vihāra for some time to learn the Buddhist scriptures and *yojgaśāstra* under him. He paid great tribute to Śīlabhadra for his learning and knowledge. Śīlabhadra rose to be eminent for his principles and subtleties and his fame extended to foreign countries²⁸.

For his humble attitude, the great scholar was respected by all the Śramaṇas of the Nālandā Mahāvihāra. They called him 'Sadharmer Bhāndāra'.

His works '*The Ārya Buddha Bhūmi-Vyakhyāna*' had been translated into Tibetan language. It has been preserved in Tibet.

Sārah : Sārah, a famous scholar of ancient India, is said to be a native of Bengal. He was one of the earliest Tantrika Buddhist scholars. He was equally learned in Brāhmanical and Buddhist philosophy. He has been assigned to the 7th century A.D. In the Bstan-hgyur the Tibetan collection Tanjur twenty books are attributed to him. Dr. Majumdar is not sure about his identity²⁹.

Jinendrabodhi (or Jinendrabuddhi): Jinendrabodhi was the author of the commentary on Pāṇini's '*Ashtādhyāyī*' called *Kāśikā-Vivarna Panjikā*, better known as *Nyāsa*. He was born in the 8th century A.D. Once his works were extensively used. Several commentaries on the works of Jinendrabuddhi were written in Bengali. He inspired the grammarians of Bengal to write commentaries in later times.

Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa : The scholars of Bengal had shown their proficiency in writing literature and composing poems in Sanskrit from the very early times. Among them we have the names of Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa who had earned fame for composing poems.

According to traditions, he was the author of 'Veṇisaṁhāra' and had some connection with Ādiśūra. Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa belonged to the Śāṇḍilya gotra.

In this connection the name of another Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa may be mentioned. His son emigrated to Orissa and was the donee of a grant of the eight century A.D. But he belonged to vātsya gotra.

PART III

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE

Sanskrit :

Introduction : It is already noted that we do not have any idea about the literatures of Bengal of the Pre-Aryan period. The people, who belonged to the Austric group, used the dialects, in early times were known as the Monkhom dialects. Later it was developed by the Dravida languages, Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that the influences of the Dravidian languages were felt mainly on the western and central region of Bengal³⁰, though he is not sure how far it had spread out its root over the native language. He also holds the view that a third language, i.e., the language belonging to the Vote-Brahma group, known as the language of Kirātas, had some influences over the languages of Northern and eastern region of Bengal³¹. But it is difficult to believe that anything that may properly be called literature existed in Bengal in the Pre-Aryan period.

The Vedic Aryanas of Northern India regarded Bengal and eastern part of Bihar as the land of the 'Prāchyas' (easterners). They had little respect for the languages (as well as culture) of eastern India. To the Aryans the language of the people of Bengal was difficult and meaningless. They used some contemptuous terms against the people of Bengal.

Bengal began to accept the supremacy of the Aryan languages and culture from the time of the Mauryas. A part of Northern and Western Bengal had been annexed to their empire. And from this time the influences of the Prākṛit were clearly visible. The oldest inscription of Bengal was the *Mahāsthān inscription*. It was found in the Bogra district of Bangladesh. It was written in the third century B.C. It is written in Prākṛit language and in the Brāhmi script.

Cultivation and Developmen of Sanskrit Literature :

The thorough cultivation of Sanskrit in Bengal had begun from the time of the Guptas. It became the medium of instruction. The educated section began to prefer Sanskrit to other Regional languages.

The first remarkable inscription found so far, written in Sanskrit, is the *Śuśunīā Inscription of Chandravarmana*. It was written in the 4th century A.D. The inscription is written in prose and it indicates that the people till then were not well conversant in Sanskrit. In subsequent period the people of Bengal were to compose beautiful poems in Sanskrit. The inscriptions of Bengal of the 7th century A.D. show the proficiency of the educated section in the language. These inscriptions (of the 7th century A.D.) were written in poems and were full of similies and Metaphores. The authority of the educated section over the language encouraged them to invent a new style called *Gauḍiya rīti* (or *Gauḍesh-Vakashara-dambarah*) (The *Gauḍesha Vakashara dambarah* indicates the use of high sounding words).

From the descriptions of the Chinese travellers like Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-Tsing and others it is clear that a large number of Buddhist *vihāras* existed in Bengal in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. Besides the *vihāras* a number of Brāhmaṇical institutions had been set up in Bengal. It is already noted that from the time of the Guptas Sanskrit became the medium of instruction. The pupils of different institutions began to learn Sanskrit Grammar, phonetics, philology etc. in their curriculam. Besides these they were taught different subjects like astronomy, Medical science, Buddhist theology, Vedas, Sāṅkhyas, Yoga, music, poetics, painting, eighteen *Nikāyas* etc. in their educational institutions. The texts were written in Sanskrit. To read the Buddhist scriptures and theology, I-Tsing learnt Sanskrit in *Tāmralipta*. Scholars like Dr. R.C. Majumdar hold the view that the thorough cultivation of Sanskrit had begun in Bengal from the 6th century A.D., if not before³². It gave the educated section a chance to cultivate the language thoroughly. The thorough cultivation of Sanskrit helped the growth of a developed Sanskrit literature in Bengal.

The gradual development of Sanskrit literature can be noticed from the inscriptions of Bengal. It is already told that the *Śuśuniā inscriptions of Chandravarman* (of the 4th century A.D.) indicates that the people were not well conversant in Sanskrit till then and for which it was written in prose. But the inscriptions (as well as land grants) of the 5th century A.D. and 6th century A.D., though written in prose, showed a far greater acquaintance with Sanskrit literature. From the 7th century A.D. their authority in the language encouraged them to write beautiful poems and to invent the *Gauḍīya Rīti*. Though *Bāṇabhaṭṭa* assumes a cynical attitude towards it and describes it a pomp of syllables (*Gauḍ desha vākshara dambarah*), it certainly shows the independent growth of Sanskrit literature in Bengal and led to the evolution of a characteristic style of its own.

The inscriptions found in different parts of Bengal were composed in beautiful verses. They were full of similies and metaphors. They were properly used and made the lines resounding. This system was appreciated by a section of poets of other parts of India. They began to follow the system.

The mastery of *chandragomīṇ* in the science of Grammar encouraged the Bengali Grammarians to cultivate the subject thoroughly. He was followed by a number of Grammarians in later time. Among these grammarians the name of *Jinendrabodhi* is mentioned earlier.

In the science of lexicography the scholars of Bengal began to show equal proficiency and a number of lexicographers flourished in Bengal in the *Pāla* period.

The scholars of Bengal earned much respect for their wide knowledge in *Mīmāṃsā*. The epigraphic records, beginning from the 5th century A.D. refer to the thorough cultivation of *Smṛiti* and *Mīmāṃsā* in Bengal. Both the *Mīmāṃsā* School of *Kumārila Bhaṭṭa* and *Prabhākara Vrihati* began to flourish in Bengal. The oldest Bengali scholar of the *Mīmāṃsā* school was *Salikānatha* who composed a *Panchika* on the commentaries of *Laghvi* and *Bṛihati* of *Prabhākara*.

It is already noted that from the very ancient times Bengal

was famous for the treatment of elephant. The Hastyāyurveda had been developed in Bengal, though the scholars are not sure if Palakāpya, a noted sage and vetenary surgeon of ancient India, (5th or 6th century A.D.) was a native of Bengal. Palakāpya's contribution to the Hastyāyurveda deserves mention as an eastern production of great interest³³.

From the writings of Hiuen Tsang we know that medical sciences were taught in the different *vihāras* of Bengal. The scholars in later times had earned much reputation in writing the commentaries on Charak.

The thorough cultivation of knowledge in different subjects like philosophy (including *mīmāṃsā*), poetics, astronomy, law etc. had been going on when Hiuen Tsang visited Nalanda and other *vihāras* of Bengal. Books were written in different subjects. The efforts of the scholars of Bengal not only helped to have their authority in different branches of knowledge, it also widened their knowledge in Sanskrit.

In the previous chapter it is already mentioned that the writers of Bengal from the end of the 6th century A.D. began to compose poems, full of rhetories. This system was called the *Gaiudīya riti*. Bānabhaṭṭa could not appreciate the practice. He says that the writers of North use Pun and irony in large numbers in their works, while the writers of the west insist only on the sense, in the south, it is poetical fancy; in Gauḍa, pomp of syllables can be seen (*Vaksharadambara*). Though some scholars find a partisan spirit in the works of Bāṇa, who had a supreme contempt for Bengal owing to historical spirit, it must be remembered that he, in this passage, is describing the characteristics of the poets of different parts of India. Actually, he paid some tribute to the poets of Bengal for their wealth of Vocabulary. It is also suggested by some scholars that Bāṇa himself could not avoid the practice in his own works.

Both Bhāmaha, who lived towards the end of the 7th century and beginning of 8th century A.D. and Daṇḍin, who lived in the first half of the 8th century A.D., have discussed the two important practices of the poets of Northern India viz, the

Vidarbha *rīti* and the Gaudya *rīti*. Both the critics regard the two practices as full of most poetic expressions. Bhāmah favours the Gaudya school, as he regards the Gaudya *rīti* superior to the others. Daṇḍi prefers the Vaidarbhi school and he thinks that it follows the classical rule of the Sanskrit literature.

From the writings of Bāṇa, Bhāmah and Daṇḍin it appears that inspite of the adverse opinions of some critics the Gaudya school, it drew the attention of the poets and critics of Northern India from the 7th century A.D.

An earlier specimen of the Gauḍ *rīti* can be found in the *Nidhanpur Inscription of Bhāskarvarmana*. It is written in prose. Praising Bhāskarvarmana the inscription says "Sha Jagaduyakalpanasta moya hetu Bhāgavata Kamalasambha bana bakirna baruasrama dhama prabibhagaya nirmita Bhubanapatiribadaya nirukutamandala" ...³⁴. The long resounding words and sentences are to show the chief characteristics of Gauḍa *rīti*. Besides this inscription we have the inscriptions of the Pāla and Sena periods. These inscriptions generally describe the notable works of the two dynasties. The inscriptions of the Pāla and Sena periods are written in poem. They indicate the gradual mastery of the scholars as well as the poets of Bengal over the Gauḍa *rīti*.

It is already noted that from the Gupta period Bengal had begun to embrace the systematic culture of Northern India. Within a short time they were able to get proficiency in different branches of education and culture of the people of Northern India. But the people of Bengal were conscious of their own intellect and power and they brought a synthesis between the education and culture of the Northern India and the education and culture of their own with the help of their intellect. Some times, they invented a new way and sometimes they made an alternation to make it more colourful. The Gauḍa *rīti* was an example of their attempts to make the language more colourful and resounding.

The Growth of Prakrits : Apabhraṃśa and Abahatta :

While the learned section had been engaged in thorough cultivation of Sanskrit, inventing sounding and bombast words, a section of Buddhist and Jain saints tried to invent a literature for the common mass. They did it for the sake of their own religion, They were later assisted by some writers of Hindu religion. The attempts of these monk and writers gave birth to the Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa literature of India.

The growth of Apabhraṃśa language and literature brought a significant change in the history of literature of India. The evolution of different Indian vernaculars from one common parent language (i.e. Sanskrit) passed through different stages and the first stage is represented by the languages known as Pāli, Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa. They appeared during the period from 500 B.C to 1000 A.D. During the last 500 years (from 500 A.D. to 1000 A.D) of this period the Prakrits were gradually replaced by Apabhraṃśa and its later phase by Avahaṭṭa (or Laukika) language, out of which there appeared the New Indo-Aryan speeches, the Bhāṣhās or Vernaculars like Bengali, Hindi, Maithili, Nepali, Assamese, Oriya Gujrati, Marathi etc.

Prākṛit : Dr. Ashit Kumar Bandopadhyaya in his works says, the word 'Prakrit' denotes the language either simplified by the common people or the language which had it's origin (Prakṛiti) in Sanskrit. It is also known as Middle Indo-Aryan language.^{34A}

Pāli and Prakrit were preferred by the preachers of Jainism and Buddhism viz. the followers of Gautama Buddha and Mahāvīra. In order to make his religions more popular to the common people Gautama Buddha used Pāli language. The sacred books of these two religions were written in this language. After the appearance of Prakrit in the field of literature it was divided into four regional groups, viz, the Saurasani Prakrit (popular in Central India), Maharāstriya Prakrit (popular in Western India), Māgadhi Prakrit (popular in Eastern India) and Paichāsi Prakrit (used in North Western India)³⁵.

Though the Prakrits were at first looked down upon by the scholars of Sanskrit, they became popular to the common people.

The writers of the Sanskrit literature had to give them recognition subsequently, realising the popularity of the languages. Some Smṛitikāras say that Sanskrit was the language for the monarchs' and nobility (i.e., high officials, Brāhmaṇas and inmates of the Tapovanas) while the Prākṛits were the languages of the common people. The women of the upper community were allowed to speak in Māgadhi Prākṛit. The Sanskrit play writers also allowed the characters of the common people to use the Prākṛit dialogues in their plays.

In eastern India (including Bihar and Bengal) there developed the Māgadhi Prākṛit. In spite of the cynical attitude of the scholarly section, Prākṛits became more and more popular to the common people. The Grammarians wrote Grammars on the Prākṛits.

But the tendency to make the languages more and more simple had been going on. Some indisciplines in the use of grammar were observed and from Prākṛits there appeared the Apabhraṁśa language and literature³⁶.

Apabhraṁśa : From different sources it appears that the Māgadhi Apabhraṁśa and Saurasenī Apabhraṁśa had been introduced in Ancient Bengal; with them appeared the Abahatṭa literatures. Abahatṭa was actually a branch of Apabhraṁśa. The Apabhraṁśa and Abahatṭa developed side by side with Sanskrit. The influence of the Abahatṭa languages can be noticed in the literatures of eastern India (Bengal and Bihar) in the Pre-Pāla and the Pāla periods.

From Apabhraṁśa there arose the regional languages like Hindi, Mārāṭhi, Gujrāṭi, Oriya, Bengali etc. during the closing centuries of the first millennium A.D. and among these regional languages Bengali, Āssamese and Oriyā formed a very closely connected group. The earlier specimens of Bengali literature were the *charyā* songs.

It is already noted that Apabhraṁśas and Abahattas began to flourish in Northern India from the 5th century A.D. and they were the languages of the common people. They sprang up from the Prākṛits. Abahatṭa insisted on the colloquial speech of a

particular region of India and subsequently it became the regional language of Northern India. They became very popular among the Buddhist monks and preachers and for which Abahaṭṭas were called 'Buddha Sanskrit' (Sanskrit, practised by the followers of Buddha). Dr. Sukumar Sen thinks that possibly the Mahābharata and some *purāṇas* compiled in this period were written in these languages to make them easier to the common people.

The Apabhraṃśa and Abahaṭṭa literatures appeared in Bengal in the Pre-Pāla period. They became popular in the Pāla period. Many books were written in these languages. The Jaina and the Buddhist monks used to write books in these languages. The followers of the Bajrayāna schools and Nātha school of Bengal had written a number of books in these languages.

The Pāla and the Sena periods witnessed the experiments of the writers of the Apabhraṃśa literature and neo-Bengali literatures. They wanted to make these literatures more popular among the common mass. Through these literatures the Buddhist Siddhāchāryas tried to explain the religious ideas and philosophy of their religion. But these literatures could not win the heart of the learned section owing to their lack of depthness.

Though sometimes the learned (as well as cultured) scholars tried to write poems in Abahaṭṭa language, they achieved little success. Most of the successful writers used simple words and used the dialects of the native people.

Though the specimens of the Abahaṭṭa literatures are very rare, we have an inscription of Mālhwā, written in the Abahaṭṭa, which describes the beauties of women in different places of India. It is a long poem, but the language is very simple and the readers feel charmed by its loveliness.

Charyā literature : In our period there is little scope to discuss the growth and development of Bengali literature. Most of the scholars think that A.D. 1000 was a convenient date for the development of Bengali, Assamese and Oriya languages. By this time these languages had become fully established and Bengali language had taken a definite shape.

The chārya songs are regarded as the earliest specimens of

the Bengali literature. Maha-Mahomopadhya Haraprasad Sastri discovered the songs in the Royal Court of Nepal. Observing the influences of the Abahattas on these songs, some scholars have hesitation to accept them as pure Bengali language while some scholars think that they are specimens of Hindi or Assamese language of early times. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee holds the view that these songs clearly belong to Bengali language and literature³⁷. Actually these songs were composed in the early stage of Bengali language. The language of the Dohās, which are published with the songs, is admittedly western Apabhramśa³⁸.

The Sahajiyā school of Buddhism had composed the songs to express the hidden philosophy of the Sahajiyā school. The 'charyā' means practices and the Charya songs indicate the religious practices used to be observed by the Sahajiyā school. Through these songs they give a significant interpretation of life. About fifty songs had been composed by twenty-three writers. Among them Kaṇhupada had composed thirteen songs. Besides Kaṇhupada we can mention the names of Louis Pada, Hāḍipā, Jalandnaripā, Bhusukupāda, Kukkuripāda, Sarahā, Shānti and others.

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee thinks that these *charyā* songs have been composed between 10th century A.D. and 12th century A.D. Though Dr. Sahidullah expresses his opinion that the songs have been composed two or three hundred years earlier than the 10th A.D., he also thinks that Louis Pāda and some other writers of the Charya songs might have appeared in the 7th or 8th century A.D. If the views of Dr. Sahidullah are accepted we are bound to admit that there was no development of the Charyā literatures for four hundred years. All the writers of the Charyā songs had followed the same style and same fashion for a long time. But the views of Dr. Sahidullah are difficult to accept for historic reasons.

The Charyā songs throw much light on the life and culture of the common people of Bengal. They also indicate the desire of the common people. Dr. S. K. Sen finds the bud of the lyric poem in these songs.

The efforts, which had been started from the growth of the

Prākṛit language, to make the language and literature easier for the common people, had reached a definite goal with the growth and development of Bengali language. The Gupta, postGupta (as well as Pre-Pāla) periods observed the development of the Prākṛits, Apabhraṁśa and Abahaṭṭa languages in Bengal.

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3. *The Baudhan Dharmasutra*, 1,2, 13-15.
4. *The Mahābhāṣya* p. -(quoted from B.9. P - 721)
5. *B I*, Vol. II, p. 721.
6. Roy, Bharat Kumar: *Prāchin Bhārater Lekha Sahitya*, p. 73 The inscription appears that the Maurya ruler had issued order to the Mahamātra stationed at Pundanaḡara to give relief to the distressed caused, apparently, by famine to the people called Samvamgiyas who were settled in and about the town.
7. *C B I*, pp. 40-41.
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CHAPTER VI

ART-ARCHITECTURE : MUSIC-DANCE AND DRAMA ETC.

A land can be known by its culture. The development of the culture, on the other hand, depends on various things like the political stability of the land, economic prosperity of the people, socio-religious progress, relation with other neighbouring countries etc.

The native tribes, settled down in different parts of Bengal, had to build up their own culture. It had been to a great extent, different from the culture of the Aryan tribes of Northern India. But unfortunately we do not have any definite information about the cultural development of the people of the land of the pre-Aryan period.

But the excavations of Tāmralipta, Chandraketugaḍ and other places indicate that a civilisation had been built up in Bengal in the second millennium B.C.¹ Bengal had to observe a gradual development of her culture step by step. It is sure that when the Aryan invasion took place in Bengal, the land possessed a culture of its own. After the invasion of the Aryan people, a great impact had taken place in the field of culture which could be noticed in the field of art, architecture, music, dance, drama and other fields.

The epigraphic records and the accounts of the foreign travellers like Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsang, I-Tsing etc. throw some light on the cultural life of the people of Bengal. But these sources are inadequate; the scholars are to feel the need of other sources to have a clear idea about the cultural life of the people of ancient Bengal. The *Charyā songs*, *Rājatarāṅginī* and the works of Sandhyā Kara Nandi are to throw light on the subject. Besides these, for art and architecture we can depend on the plaques of Mayanāmatī and Pahāḍpur and the ruins of temples and *vihāras* discovered in different parts of Bengal.

Art and Architecture : A number of *stūpas*, *vihāras* and monasteries of the pre Pāla period have been discovered in different parts of Bengal. Though from the accounts of the Chinese travellers we come to know the existence of a large number of *stūpas* and *vihāras* in Bengal, only a few of their ruins have been discovered so far.

The causes of their destruction are not far to seek. They could not stand against the wheel of time; alluvial soil and the tropical climate brought their destructions earlier. They were also constructed on perishable materials like bricks, wood and clay. They were not properly maintained. Besides these a large number of *stūpas*, *vihāras*, temples and monasteries had been destroyed by the Muslim invaders. Sometimes they destroyed them for construction of mosques and palaces. They used the materials of the old structures to build up their mosques and palaces.

Stūpas : The ruins of a number of *stūpas* have been discovered in some parts of Bengal. But the number is not still remarkable. These *stūpas* were built mainly by the Jain and Buddhist monks of Bengal.

Buddhist Stūpas : The Buddhists of Bengal in order to preserve the enshrine the bone of Buddha or his disciples built the *stūpas*. The followers of Buddha also built *Paribhoggic stūpas*, where the articles used by lord Buddha were kept. Sometimes the *Nirdeśhik stūpas* were built either to mark the spot where Buddha stayed sometimes in course of his travel or to mark some important events, Connected with his life². In later period, these *stūpas* were regarded as a symbol of Buddhism. The disciples regarded the construction of the *stūpas* as a pious object. The *stūpas* were decorated with images of Buddha.

In the early period, circular altar was erected to place an *aṇḍa* (which was semi-circular in shape) and a *hārmica*, just above them placed the bone or articles of Buddha. To give protection to the articles an umbrella was erected above the *Hārmica*. Hiuen Tsang mentions a number of *stūpas* in Bengal erected by Aśoka the great. Dr. N.R. Roy thinks that these *stūpas* might have been

erected with the spread of Buddhism in Bengal by the patrons of Buddhism in different times and Hiuen Tsang had seen them³.

Some of these *stūpas*, either moulded in bronze or engraved on stone, have been discovered in different parts of Bengal. But they do not throw light on the architectural trend of Bengal. The brick-built *stūpas* found in Bengal have a similarity with the *stūpas* of Bihar.

Among the *stūpas* found in Bengal it is presumed that the *stūpa* found at Bharatpur in Burdwan district was the oldest. It has been destroyed almost. Only the platform exists somehow. So it is difficult to imagine what the actual shape of the *stūpa* was. One of the oldest *stūpas* was the Ashrafpur *stūpa*. It was made of bronze. Two large *stūpas* have been discovered, one at Pāhaḍpur and another at Bāhulārā in the Bankura district. From their ruins it can be presumed that they were very high, consisting of successive tiers of elaborate mouldings. They were possibly decorated with flowers and different types of images of Buddha⁴. The votive *stūpas* are generally found standing alone, but sometimes, they formed a row and occasionally a group of them stand on a big platform. Similar types of *stūpas* can be found in Bihar. Therefore it can be presumed that the structures on the basement were the same.

Most of the *stūpas* of Bengal were built of bricks. They were decorated with terracotta plaques. They were cruciform in plan. Very few *stūpas* were either square or circular.

A specimen of votive *stūpas* has been discovered at Jogi-Guphā. It probably, had a hemispherical structure. There was also a corresponding elevation of each component part. Different parts of the *stūpa* were decorated with figures. The plain dome was surmounted by the *harmikā*, not square but circular and ribbed on edge, just like *āmalka-śilā* of a temple⁵.

Three remarkable bronze votive *stūpas* of ancient period have been discovered so far. It is already mentioned that possibly Ashrafpur bronze votive *stūpas* was the oldest of these three. It bears two copper plates of the Khadga dynasty. It was probably built in the 7th or 8th century A.D. It consists of a cylindrical

drum and hemispherical dome supported on a lotus over a high and slightly sloping basement, which is square with one offset projection on each face⁶. The basement and drum are decorated with images. The artistic skill of the *stūpa* is praiseworthy.

The other two *stūpas* discovered at Pāhāḍpur and Jhewāri respectively have had a cruciform basement. The Pāhāḍpur *stūpa* exhibits four concentric rings, just below the dome. Both the *stūpas* were decorated with images of Buddha.

I-Tsing, the Chinese traveller had noticed a *stūpa* named Mṛigasthāpana in Varendra in the 7th century A.D. Hiuen Tsang, in course of his travel to Bengal, had noticed a number of *stūpas*. But to-day there are no traces of these *stūpas*.

It is already noted that these *stūpas* were generally built of bricks. They were small in size and followed the designs of the eastern school of architecture. The architects of these *stūpas* could not invent any new style.

In later period, possibly the Buddhists of Bengal did not prefer to erect new *stūpas*. In this connection, Prof. N.R.Roy says that there existed little relation between the *stūpas* and the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools. The Mahāyāna school and Vajrayāna school of Bengal gave little importance to build *stūpas* to pay homage to Buddha⁷.

The Vihāras : The *Vihāras* were regarded as inseparable parts of Buddhism. The Buddhist monks used to live and study the scriptures in the *Vihāras*. They were to preach the doctrines of Buddha to the local people.

Since the preachings of Buddha, a number of *Vihāras* had been set up in Bengal. The Chinese travellers like Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-Tsing etc. have mentioned a number of *Vihāras* of Bengal in their works.

From their works it can be presumed that these *Vihāras* were situated on a large space. The lands were generally donated by kings or rich nobility. They were built either of bricks or of stones.

The *Vihāras* built in Bengal, had four rows of cells round the four sides of a courtyard. A running varendah along the cells gave access to each cell through a door. The great *Vihāras* of

Pāhāḍpur had the same plan, though it had a large dimension with a huge temple in the centre of the courtyard. There existed a number of small shrines, votive *stūpas* and structures. These structures might have been used as kitchen, bathing platform and for other useful purposes.

Very few *Vihāras* of the pre-Pāla period have been discovered so far. The ruins of the Bhāsu *Vihāra* (which Hiuen Tsang describes as Po-chi-po of Puṇḍravardhana) and Raktamṛittikā *Vihāra* (lo-to-mo-chih of Kaṇḍasuvārṇa) have been discovered through archeological excavations. The Bhasu *Vihāra* was discovered near Mahāsthān and Raktamṛittikā *Vihāra* at Rākshasdāṅgā in the Murshidabad district. The ruins of these *Vihāras* bear the signs of grandeur and prosperity of these *Vihāras* in their times.

The Jain Monastery : The ruins of Jain monasteries have been discovered at Pāhāḍpur and Goāl-bhitā (Vātgoḥālī). The inscriptions found at Pāhāḍpur Jain monastery throw some important light on the date of foundation of the monastery. It seems that it had been founded much before 479 A.D.

It is presumed by scholars like Kāshināth Dikshit that the Jain temple had four faced (*chaturmukha*) entrance and it might have inspired to erect the great temple of Pāhāḍpur in later times⁸.

Besides the Jain monastery of Pāhāḍpur, the ruins of a great Jain monastery of Dharmapāla at Sompura has been discovered early in the 20th century. It might have been constructed in the 8th century (or early 9th century A.D.). A set of clay sealings were found in the ruins of the great monastery. Prof. K. N. Dikshit having observed the ruins of the monastery, rightly remarks. 'No single monastery of such dimension has come to light in India. Of the Jain monasteries, so far discovered in Bengal, it is the finest specimen⁹.

Temples : A few number of temples of the pre-Pāla period have been discovered in Bengal through the archaeological excavations in recent times.

Among the old remarkable temples belonging to the pre-Pāla period, were the chandraketugaḍ temple (Berāchāmpā, of

the North 24 Parganas) and the Pancharatna temple of Rajbāḍidāngā (in the Murshidabad district). Another remarkable old temple was the Pāhāḍpur temple (in the Rājsahi district of Bangladesh). But, probably, it was built in the Pāla period.

The temple of Chandraketugaḍ had been built up in the Gupta period while the Pañcharatna temple had been built up in the same or slightly later period. The ruins of a temple have also been discovered at Balinda (near Harwa, North 24 Parganas) and it is suggested that it might have been built in the post—Gupta period. From the ruins of the temples it can be imagined that the architects of the temples had followed the trends of the Northern India. They did not invent any new art or designs. They had not been influenced by the architects of Orissa or of Southern India.

The temple of Chandraketugaḍ had a large square sanctum cella with projections on three sides and they were covered with cloistered passage. The bigger square was preceded by a rectangular covered vestibule with a rectangular open porch in front, completed with a flight of steps. Around the larger square, the vestibule and the porch was a rectangular structure of projections on three sides. The two sides upto the vestibules were decorated with shallow niches. The temple was made of moulded bricks. Near the temple there exists the remains of miniature replica of temples and basement of a votive *stūpa*.

The Pancharatna temple complex of Rājbaḍidāngā had some characteristics. It had a rectangular enclosure wall and four square shrines at the four corners. A rectangular *maṇḍapa* was on the north Surkhi; rammed platform made it distinct. Main temple had been erected on a special plan, i.e. *triratha* shape. The rectangular main temple measuring 7.84 x 7m, had projection on three sides, leaving northern sides open for entrance for which it has been called *triratha* in shape. To the south of the main temple complex there existed another oblong temple complex, consisting of walls, platform and a half round shape entrance platform on a rectangular basement¹¹.

Among the old magnificent temples of ancient Bengal, the most remarkable was the Pāhāḍpur temple. The architects had

to build the temple very carefully and in a planned way. But possibly it was built in the reign of Dharmapāla¹².

The temple of pāhāḍpur had to bear the witness of the gradual development of the eastern school of art which had been started since the Gupta Age.

Some ruins of the old structures had been discovered at Gokul (near Māhāsthān) Govindavitā and other places of Bengal. But they had been constructed in the Pāla period. So our knowledge about the development of architecture of the Pre-Pāla period is limited.

Terracottas and images : From the very ancient times the artistic instincts of men encouraged them to make images of men, animals, birds and other things. They were to create them with the help of stone, metals and with soft clay.

The images made of soft clay were to be burnt by fire to make them durable. Thus grew the terracotta art. The terracotta art had been flourished in Bengal from the olden times. The houses, temples and *vihāras* were decorated with them. Even today some of the fine specimens of terracottas can be found in the temples (like the temple of Madan Mohon of Bishnupur) of West Bengal.

The art had been flourished in Bengal before the second century B.C. The terracotta images served different purposes. The children used to play with the earthen dolls and toys. The houses and temples were also decorated with the terracotta images.

From different evidences it can be presumed that the art of clay modelling had been flourished in Bengal in the Pre-Maurya period^{12A}.

It is already noted that through the terracottas, the artists were to give the shape of various familiar 'things like men and women, birds and animals of different kinds. Sometimes through these images, the familiar stories or life of men were described. The terracottas of Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmatī describe the life of common men and their activities.

Through these terracottas we can have an idea about the skills of the artists of that age.

A large number of terracottas have been preserved in different museums of Bengal (like the Āshutosh Museum of Calcutta, Tamluk Museum, Gurusaday Museum of Bratachārigrem etc).

Among the old specimens of the Pre-historic period, we can mention the two exotic terracottas of human heads, one with pointed helmet found at Pāṇḍu Rājār Dhibi¹³ and another, having the shape of a forepart of a bull with a fan shaped hump and perforated mouth, found at Harinārāyaṇpur¹⁴ in 24 Parganas district.

A number of terracottas of Śuṅga-Kushāṇa period have been found in different parts of Bengal. They have been found at Tamluk and Raghunāthbāri (in Midnapore district), Bāchri (in the Howrah district), Pokhraṇ (in Bankura district), Harinārāyaṇpur and Berāchampā (in 24 Parganas), Bāngarh (in West Dinajpur) and Mahāsthān and other places of modern Bangladesh.

The clay modellers of Tāmralipta had shown much proficiency in clay modelling, P. C. Dasgupta, ex-Director of Archaeology West Bengal, rightly says, "The clay modellers of Tāmralipta with the inner perception for the beautiful and a spontaneous understanding of the symbolic tales and allegories lent a new fragrance to their art in the Maurya and Śuṅga-kushāṇa epoch"¹⁵.

Among the terracottas of the early period discovered at Tamluk through excavations, the terracotta of a female, i.e. Oxford Figurine can be mentioned here. Dr. *Stella kramrich* thinks that she is identical with Apsarā Pañchachurā of Mahābhārāta, while Prof. Johnston regards her as goddess Maya of the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus of Egypt¹⁶. Considering the beauty of the Oxford Figurine Dr. Dasgupta thinks that "it occupies an honoured place amidst the array of early Indian terracottas which often visualise a deep perception and warmth of feeling in respect of the grace and elegance of form as experienced through tradition and assimilation of styles"¹⁷.

It is already noted that a number of terracotta yakshas,

yaksinis, narrative plaques, animal figures and pottery works discovered at Tamluk and other places are now kept in the Ashutosh Museum of Indian art of Calcutta University, Tamluk Museum and Gurusaday Museum of Bratachārigram. They bear the taste of urban civilisation and the sign of prosperity of ancient Bengal.

A terracotta plaque with three lines of greek inscription had been found at Tilda in Midnapore district. It indicates the commercial relation of Bengal with Greece and outside India.

A terracotta figurine of the Maurya period has been found at Pokhraṇ (in Bankura district). Another female figurine of the Maurya Age has been discovered at Tamluk. The recent excavations at Chandraketuḡaḡ, Harinārāyaṇpur and Pāṇḡurājār Dhibi also helped to get a number of images of the Śuṅga-Kushāṇa period. Some of the images of Yakshinis of Tamluk of the Śuṅga-Kushāṇa period exhibit a high degree of artistic skill and imaginative power of the artists of Bengal who made them with much attention. They also bear witness to early contacts with the cultural sphere of the Greeco-Romans¹⁸.

Some of the terracottas of Tamluk and other places visualise scenes from the Buddhist Jātakas and other legends of antiquity¹⁹.

Among the remarkable terracottas of the Śuṅga-kushāṇa period so far discovered in Bengal were (i) A royal couple riding on elephant led by a *Māhuta* (driver), (ii) Winged male and female figures as images of yakshas and yakshinis (iii) a headless warrior (iv) A *dampati* plaques, riding on a toy cart, holding a pair of fish and (v) the terracotas depicting ships and mast²⁰.

Some of the terracottas represent the familiar scenes of the old stories like the hunting scene of Dushyaṇṡa and the previous lives of Buddha.

The chief characteristics of the terracottas of the post-Maurya period were the introduction of new ethnic types, representing the racial influx of the period. Most of the figures were slender and refined in forms. They had a flexible attitude which was not known in the Maurya period. The face of the women had an oval shape. The eyes were wide open and cheeks

were rounded. They used to wear different ornaments. The spherical breasts, the sensitive modelling of the back and other trends remind us of a link between the artists of Bengal and the artists of Mathura school.

The terracottas of the Gupta period have also been found in Bengal. Among the terracottas we may mention here a plaque representing a richly adorned dancing male figure. It is unique in the round with applied eyeballs, pinched up nose and ears and outspread ornamented short hands shown up to the waist²¹.

The terracottas of the Gupta period are not enough in number. But they bear the refined traits of the Gupta tradition. The style is more human, and less hieratic. The spiritual experience is less intense²².

The style introduced from the Gupta age had been continued at least for the next five hundred years.

Sculptures : Like other fields of art, Bengal had made some progress in the field of sculpture.

A few images of the Pre-Maurya period have been discovered in Bengal so far. Among them (i) the head and bust of Bodhisattava, made of red sand-stone found at Chandraketugad, (ii) A red stone torso of a deity (probably kārṭikeya) found at Mahāsthān, (iii) Two sand stone images of Sūrya discovered at Kumārpur and Niyāmatpur (Rajsahi district of Bāngladesh), sand stone images of Vishnu at Hānkraail (in Malda district) deserve special mention.

The first two images had been sculptured in the Kushāṇa period. They represent the characteristic of the Kushāṇa period. They were made of red stone, which had an extensive use in Mathurā and were not available in Bengal, It can be presumed that they might have been imported from outside.

In this connection it can be reminded that the images of the Kushāṇa period had some spacial characteristics. A number of images had long tunic covering the body from the neck to knee such as found in the images of the Kushāṇa kings. The images had broad and heavy features. Some of the images have shaven

skull, the short bent wide open eyes and the raised eyebrows with descending curves, at the extremities present clear affinities with the heads of the Buddha. Bodhisattva type of Mathura. They also have some similarity with the contemporary Gāndhāra school of art²³.

After the Kushāṇa school, there appeared the Gupta school of art in Bengal which was clearly distinct from the Kushāṇa school. Dr. R.C. Majumdar, while describing the features of the Gupta school says, "its chief characteristics of the school are not only delicacy and refinement of form and a relaxed attitude indicated by the calmness of the face, the deposition of the two hands avoiding harsh angles at the elbows noticed in the Kushāṇa images and generally speaking, graceful pose of the body in place of the erect posture²⁴."

It can't be denied that the Bengal sculpture of the Gupta Age had got some inspiration from the Sārnāth school. But in spite of its inspiration of the Sārnāth School, it tried to add something of its own. According to some art critics the 'Eastern trend' of the Gupta art had been distinguished by a vivacious emotion. Stella Kramrisch describes it as 'the eastern version of the classical idiom of Sarnath'. A suitable change can be noticed in the plastic content of the images. The figures acquire thereby a sensuous import, hardly to be expected in the spiritual and impersonal creations of Sarnath²⁵.

Among the images of that period found in different parts of Bengal we can mention (i) a standing image of Buddha found at Bhārail (Rajshahi district). It is made of chunār sand-stone. The sculptor had followed the Sārnath school. The image might have been built in the beginning of the 5th century A.D. (ii) The two Sūrya images, one found at Kāshipur (24 Parganas) and another at Deorā (Bogra district of Bangladesh), belonged to the Gupta school of the eastern trend. Both figures are markedly different from the Kushāṇa school. They exhibit a graceful form. They have been assigned to the 6th century A.D. (iii) The images of Chakrapurusha, found at Mālar (in the Murshidabad district) exhibits the eastern trend of the Gupta school. It was made of

sand-stone. But the figure is un-impressive. Any delicate skill cannot be found in the image.

From the images found in North Bengal, Sundarban and Bānkura, it appears that the local sculptors had to follow a special trend; which had been flourished in the cultural Gangetic region²⁶.

Bronze-images : A number of bronze images of the Gupta period have been discovered in different parts of Bengal.

Among these images, the image of Manjuśree found at Mahāsthān can be mentioned here. The graceful and exquisitely Buddhist Goddess is one of the best specimens of the Bengal school of art of the Gupta period. The simple naturalism and the artistic sense make the figure distinct. It has been assigned to the 6th century A.D.

With the exception of some images (which had been sculptured or engraved in the Pāla period) the great temple of Pāhāḍpur, represent the Gupta art. They exhibit the combination of the sublime spiritualism and emotionalism of the eastern school of Gupta Age.

The images made of stone or of bronze of the post-Gupta period displaying the gradual development of the Bengal school of Art.

The inscribed image of Sarvānī, made in the post-Gupta (or of Pre-Pāla) period by the patronage of the Khaḍga dynasty (whô ruled in the 7th century A.D., is one of the finest specimens of the period. The image stands erect on a pedestal. An inscription had been insiced by Prabhābatī, a queen of the Devakhaḍga dynasty. It is found at Deulbāri in the Tripurā district. The simplicity of the whole composition and the elegance of its carving make the image charming. Another remarkable specimen of the period was a miniature Sūrya. He is seated on a chariot, drawn by seven horses. It has also been found at Deulbari, now preserved in the Dacca Museum. The two other remarkable images are (i) a metal image of Śiva who is standing erect, found at Manirtaḥ and (ii) another is Vishnuvāmaṇa image, found at West Dinajpur, now preserved in the Āshutosh Museum.

Besides these images two Buddhist bronze images and a

bronze image of Gaṇeśha can be mentioned here. They are found at Rajbāḍidāṅgā in Murshidabad district. A small image of seated Tārā has been discovered in the ruins of a Gupta temple at Kaṇa-Suvarṇa.

These bronze images bear the sign of the gradual development of the art of Bengal, The progress which had been started in Bengal since the Gupta Age, had to take a definite shape in the Pāla Period.

Art of Painting : Though Fa-Hien in his works gives some hints that the art of painting had been practised at Tāmralipta, not a single important specimen of painting of the Pre-Pāla period has been discovered so far. It can be presumed that like other parts of Bengal, the temples and *vihāras* of ancient Bengal were decorated with paintings²⁷. They could not save themselves from destruction. So we do not have any clear idea about the progress and development of painting in the Pre-Pāla period.

Fine Arts :

Songs and Music : Though from some evidences it can be presumed that people of Bengal had some attraction for music, we do not have any clear information about the development of music of the Pre-Pāla period. Prof. N.R. Roy thinks that the scholars have nothing to say about the development of dance, songs and music of Bengal before the 10th and 11th centuries A.D. for lack of informations .

It can be presumed that the native people used to express their hopes and desires, joys and sorrows through the folk songs. The nature of these songs can be imagined through the 'Charyā Songs' which express the life of the commora people, their hopes and despairs etc. and the life of the tāntrics of Bengal. Since the advent of the Guptas, the classical songs and dances of Northern India had got an access in Bengal. The rulers and the rich nobility who imitated the lifeštyle of Aryan culture, were the patrons of the classical songs and dances of Northern India.

From the Rājatarāṅginī we come to know that people of Bengal were familiar with classical songs and dances. The singers and dancers followed the rules of 'Bhārata Nāṭya Śāstra'. From

this work we come to know that the classical singers used to display their performances at the temples of Kārtikeya at Puṇḍravardhaṇa. The Rājataranginī also mentions the name of a famous Devadāsī named Kamalā of Puṇḍravardhaṇa. She had earned much fame for her performances in singing and dancing, that the fame of Kamalā had even spread out in Kāshmir.

Like other parts of India the practice of employing Devadāsīs in famous temples had been introduced in Bengal with the advent of the Aryan culture. The Devadāsīs were expert in singing and dancing. They were employed (or dedicated) to give entertainment to the gods of the temples. They, in practice, were to please the kings, the nobility and the priests of the temples, where they were employed. Though the writers of '*Pavandūta*' and '*Rāmacharita*' have assumed a bitter attitude against this corrupt practice, they admit the increasing patronages of the Pāla and sena rulers of Bengal towards the institution.

The plaques of Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmatī represent the male and female dancers of Bengal. But these dancers did not belong to the higher community. They were actually folk singers and dancers of Bengal. They had a close connection with the life of the common people. These plaques also throw some light on the life of these singers and dancers of Bengal.

Besides the plaques of Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmatī we have the 'Charyā Songs'. These songs might have been composed in the Pāla period but it can be presumed that they were not completely isolated from the Pre-Pāla period. These songs mention different types of musical instruments like lute, Damru (a small drum or tabor), flute etc. They also throw much light on the theme of the singers. These songs not only narrate the process of prayer and worships of the Sahajiyās and Bajrayānis of Bengal, but also the every day life of the untouchable and poverty-stricken life of common people²⁹.

The two parallel institutions had been growing on in Bengal since the Gupta period, while the upper community had been engaged in the cultivation of classical songs, dances and music, the common people still continued to cultivate the culture of their

own. They continued to cultivate the songs and music of their predecessors.

The popularity of the folk songs, music and dances might have been greater than the classical songs and music. Generally, the common people had little scope to enjoy the songs and dances staged in the courtyard or in the famous temples. They were controlled by the nobility and priestly class. But the nobility sometimes showed their interest in folk songs and dances. The human appeal of these songs and dances were undoubtedly greater than the songs and dances performed at the royal stages. The people liked to perform songs and dances in their socio-religious functions³⁰.

From the plaques of Maynāmatī and Pāhādpur it is found that both vocal and instrumental music were thoroughly used by the folk singers. They used the musical instruments like drums (Dhāk), flute, lyre, Mṛidaṅga, Khol (tom-tom), Kansar and even earthen pots. The 'Ramacharita' mentions a special type of Mṛidaṅga which was very popular in Bengal. Dramas were written in Sanskrit by the prominent writers. They were generally staged at the royal courts.

In the *Charyā Songs* we find the mention of 'Buddha-Nātaka' ("... Bājai alo sahi Heru a binā/Sun tanti-dhani bilasai runa/... batis tanti dhani saal bipau/Nāchanti bājila ganti devi/ Buddha Natak bisama hoi u/)³¹. From these songs of Binapāda it appears that 'Buddhanātaka' had been performed with lute and dance, though the songs do not give any information about the story and nature of the play. 'Buddha Nataka' had been staged by the Buddhists of Bengal to propogate the ideals and teachings of Buddha. But it might have been a folk tale.

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 818.
4. *H A B*, p. 6
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 606-07.

6. Ibid., p. 607.
7. B I, Vol. II, p. 820.
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9. A S I, 1927-8, p. 106.
10. Indian Archaeology, 1963-64, p. 64
11. Ibid., 1964-65, p. 49.
12. B I, Vol. II, p. 830.
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14. Ibid., 1960-61, p. 70.
15. The Archaeological Treasures of Tāmralipta, p. 5.
16. Quoted from the works of Dasgupta, P.O.; The Archaeological treasures of Tāmralipta, p. 5.
17. Ibid., p. 5.
18. Ibid., p. 6.
19. Quoting from the works of Dr. R.C. Majumtier, H A B p. 647.
20. Indian Archaeology 1958-59, p. 77.
21. Ibid., 1963-64, p. 64.
22. Saraswati S.K, Early scriptures of Bengal, p. 106.
23. Ibid., p. 14.
24. H A B, p. 625.
25. Saraswati, S.K.; Early scriptures of Bengal, p. 22.
26. B I, (Vol. II, p. 782).
27. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 806.
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30. B I, Vol. II, p. 574.
31. *Charyāpad-o-Krishna kirtan*, Canto, 17, Rāg Patamanjari-Bināpād (edited by Prof. Ghose and Mukherjee), p. 54.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The history of ancient Bengal before the rise of the Pālas had to observe some important changes and developments in different fields. These changes sometimes came as a natural process, sometimes as a result of synthesis of conflicting ideas and institutions. Throughout the period the constructive forces were at work. Though the destructive forces sometimes tried to raise their hands, they could not achieve much success. The people faced the problem with much prudence and sagacity. They showed their prudence and statesmanship when the period of anarchy had appeared in Bengal.

Before the advent of the Aryans, Bengal had built up a civilisation of her own on a solid base. She had made much progress in the field of agriculture and trade and commerce. The people had their own beliefs, customs and rituals. They were not far behind in the field of military science than the people of the north.

The gradual penetration of the Aryan tribes in Bengal since the time of the epics (viz. the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*) might have brought a conflict, but it had not affected the life of the people of the land very much. The writers of ancient period did not mention any serious type of conflict between the Aryan invaders and the native tribes of Bengal. Even the mighty Maurya emperors had not waged a war against the people of Bengal.

A cultural (as well as economic) link between Northern India and Bengal had been set up from the very early times. In spite of the restrictions of the orthodox *smṛitikārs* of the Brāhmaṇical schools of Northern India, the traders, monks etc. used to visit Bengal. The native people received them with much prudence and toleration. The cultural link with Northern and Eastern India must have enriched the culture of Bengal.

From the very early times, different native tribes like Suhmas, Pundrakas, etc. had settled down in different parts of Bengal. These places or regions had been named after these tribes. They followed different customs and practices. But with the progress of time the commercial as well as cultural link induced them to bring uniformity. The period had to observe the gradual unification of the land. The number of the *Janapadas* had been reduced gradually. The domination of Bengal by the Guptas brought a great change in the socio-political life of the people. They were acquainted with the rule of a single dynasty which encouraged the leaders of Bengal to bring different regions of Bengal under a single sovereign. Though the attempts of Śaśāṅka could not achieve much success for the diplomatic entente between Bhāskarvarman of kāmarūpa and Harshavardhana of Thāneswar, the aspiration of the people for political unification of the land had not been shattered. The growing political consciousness of a section of people and leaders of Bengal encouraged them to elect a king for the land when *Mātsyanāya* (i.e. the period of anarchy and confusion) had appeared in Bengal. They realised that peace could not be restored without a strong ruler of the land. The aspiration of the people for unification and their growing political consciousness made the period distinct.

In the field of religion, Bengal had to observe the growing influences of the Vedic religions. Though the religious ideas and practices of the native tribes had a solid base, Bengal could not check the infiltration of the Vedic religions. From the 6th century B.C., Jainism, Buddhism, Ājivikism and Brāhmanism had been preached in Bengal. The Jains had set up their strongholds in some parts of Bengal. The rise of Buddhism in Bengal had brought a significant change in the socio-religious life of Bengal. Tāmralipta and other important trading centres became the centres of Buddhist learnings. A number of native people had been converted into Buddhism. But they, instead of following the instructions of Buddha, favoured the Tāntrik form of worship in later times. Thus arose the *Sahayāṇa*, *Vajrayāṇa* and *Siddhayāṇa* schools of Bengal.

With the advent of the Guptas, Brāhmaṇism had been placed on a solid base. The gradual rise of Brāhmaṇism brought a great change in the social life of Bengal. It gave birth to the caste system. But at the initial stage it was different from the caste system of Northern India. It was based on the economic activity of the people. The native people, in spite of the patronage of the royal families towards Brāhmaṇism, were able to maintain their supremacy in the socio-religious life of Bengal.

The Smṛitikāras and the other orthodox Brāhmaṇical schools could not subdue the ideas and practices of the native people.

In this connection it should be noted that most of the people had a liberal outlook. They always tried to bring a religious synthesis between the customs and practices of the Vedic religions and the customs and practices of the native tribes. The period had not observed any serious type of religious conflict, between the Vedic Aryans and the native people of Bengal.

A large section of people remained outside the pale of Brāhmaṇism. They used to perform the rites and customs of their own. The Aryan culture could not destroy the vitality of the non-Aryan culture till then.

One of the most important features of the period was the rise and fall of the foreign trade of Bengal.

From the very early times plenty of lands and the fertility of soil encouraged the major section of people to depend on agriculture. The economic prosperity of the land encouraged the traders and businessman of other parts of India to set up a commercial link with Bengal, though the traders of Bengal could not take any important part in trade and commerce of Northern India.

The development of trade and commerce and the flourishing condition of Tāmralipta and Gaṅgābandar gave the traders and businessman a unique opportunity to carry out their trade and commerce with the Roman Empire, and with the countries of South-east Asia. It is noted that Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing in their works mention the commercial activity of

Tāmrālīpta. The flourishing condition of agriculture and trade and commerce enriched the people of Bengal. The traders and businessman were generally free from conservative outlook. They had exercised a great influence in the urban life of Bengal. The rulers and nobility gave them recognition in the social life of Bengal. Their consents were taken before the transfer or donation of lands.

But after the fall of the Gupta empire a serious change took place in the social life of Bengal. The fall of the Roman empire, the gradual ascendancy of the Arab traders and the lack of a strong Government had affected the foreign trade of India. The trade and commerce were on the road to decline. It had a great impact on the society. It had stopped the flow of gold and wealth from outside. The gradual dependence on land had brought a disaster in the economic life of Bengal. It had paved the way of feudalism. The post-Gupta period had to observe the decline of foreign trade and the gradual development of feudalistic society. The growing ascendancy of the feudal lords made the society conservative in outlook. It had also given the feudal lords a great opportunity to exploit the common people with the decline of trade and commerce. Bengal had lost her former prosperity in the economic field.

The decaying condition of trade and commerce and the gradual sloping of the traders and business might have weakened the position of Buddhism in Bengal for the time being. Taking advantage of the situation conservative Brāhmaṇical school had established their position on a solid base for which the Pāla rulers of Bengal in later times were forced to give recognition to the strengthening power of Hinduism. Dharmapāla of the Pāla dynasty donated lands for the Hindu temples of his kingdom.

The gradual-decrease of trade and commerce forced the rulers of later times to take responsibility for the maintenance of the *vihāras* and temples of Bengal. While in the Pre-Pāla period a large number of monasteries, *vihāras* and temples had been constructed by the traders and businessman, in the Pāla period,

the temples and *vihāras* were constructed and maintained by the rulers.

The period also noticed important changes in the field of education and culture. In the previous chapters it is noted that with the spread of Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism a great number of *vihāras*, monasteries and temples had been constructed in Bengal. The *vihāras* and monasteries were the centres of learning. A number of subjects, viz, scriptures, Philosophy, Sanskrit literatures, arts, medicines, etc., had been taught in these *vihāras* and monasteries. Since the Gupta period, Brāhmaṇical educational institutions had been flourished in Bengal. Students of Bengal began to visit different parts of India for the purpose of learning. The scholars of Bengal like Śīlabhadra had earned much fame even from outside India. Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-Tsing and other Chinese travellers visited the Buddhist *vihāras* of Bengal. The progress of education must have brought a change in the outlook of the people of Bengal. It had enriched the culture of Bengal. The people had shown their interest in art, architecture, sculpture, dance, drama etc. They were undoubtedly impressed by the art, architecture and songs of Northern India. The gradual progress of the people in the field of education and culture made the period remarkable.

But in spite of the gradual progress of the land in different fields, Bengal could not produce a large number of talents. Excepting some great rulers like Śaśāṅka and some scholars like Śīlabhadra, Bengal had not produced a number of great men in different fields. We have not a number of remarkable writers, religious leaders, architects, sculptors and artists for that period. In the field of art and architecture, Bengal was unable to invent a new school of her own. She had followed the Sāranātha school and the other schools of Northern India. She, yet had to take time to produce remarkable personalities.

Though the gradual improving condition of Bengal with the rest of India made the period distinct, it should be remembered that Bengal had not given up the traditions and cultures of her own. It maintained a separate identity in socio-

religious (as well as cultural) fields. Even in modern times Bengal maintains some sort of cultural differences from the rest of India.

Besides economic field and social structures, the period, on the whole can be regarded a period of seed time. The seeds of progress and developments were sown. The people had to wait till the Pala period for harvesting.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. H A B : History of Ancient Bengal by Dr. R.C. Majumdar Published by G. Bharadwaj & Co., Calcutta.
2. B I : Bangleer Itihas (Two volumes) by Dr. N.R. Roy (in Bengali). Published by Paschim Banga Niraksharata Durikaran Samity, Calcutta.
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